

FANTASTIC

SCIENCE FACT & FICTION

UNIVERSE

JANUARY 1960

35c

TWELVE MONTHS
AND A DAY

by

POUL ANDERSON

THE
PEACEMAKERS
a startling new story
by

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THE WATERS
OF
DEATH

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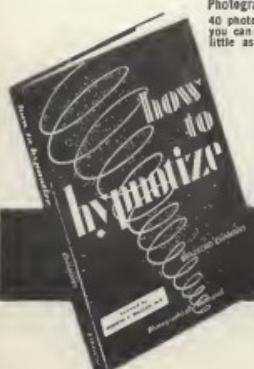
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THE QUEST

BY KIT REED

THE FIRST thing anyone in the city knew of them was their laughter. Joking and crowing, they marched through dead-still, nearly-deserted streets, loud and happy, dirty and profane. Their voices were big; they pointed to thin-faced city people who shrank in doorways and they guffawed as shop-owners blenched and slammed their doors. Clashing shining weapons, they sang to wake the dead and the sound of them echoed in streets which lay between grey buildings. It swelled and burst into the square where Dario hid, waiting for them.

Dario knew them; he had come to his city as he had to many others to see the strangers, to feel for a few minutes the force of their harsh vitality. He had been warned against the strangers; he watched for them in hiding.

There were seven. Wiry Anter and fat Grimm strode in front, singing a star-song too raw for city people's ears. William, bronzed and strong-

looking but slender as a straw, walked beside thick-necked Danton. Bold Charles, a short, strong man whose monkey face was heroically ugly, walked alone. Dario liked him best. He was quieter than the rest, but when he spoke they stopped to listen and then did as he said. Dario had seen that in the last city. Alaric and Daniel were the tallest and Grimm was strongest and Anter fought best, but all of them, including William and thick-necked Danton had listened to Charles and had done as he said.

When he walked alone in a new city there was strength and importance in him. He had the lonely look of a leader.

The strangers wore wide-topped boots and heavy trousers. Their tunics were of a light-weight shimmering stuff that caught the sunlight and threw it in the faces of the watching city people. They wore scarves, beads, greenish trinkets of a precious metal—baubles they had picked up in other cities—at their necks and on their

arms. Their hair, unlike that of any city man Dario had ever seen, was long and straight and knotted at the backs of their heads. As they reached the center of the square, the sun shafted down into the space at the center of four great buildings and caught the brilliance in their faces. Silent Charles, moved by the sunlight and his strength, threw back his head and laughed aloud.

The seven glinted brightly.

Dario had never seen anything so magnificent.

The sunlight faded and the square darkened. They were gone. Breathless, Dario skittered across the square and threw himself into the doorway of a potion shop just before the door swung shut. He pushed his way between plush chairs where grey people sat with needles in their arms and flasks of life fluid hung by their elbows and tugged at the shop owner's sleeve.

"The strangers—" he said in a respectful whisper, "where are they going now?"

"Out to the battle." Distaste curled and covered fear in the man's face. "Who cares?"

"Don't you care?" Dario knew what the answer would be.

"Why should I? They fight our battles for us, but that's no reason we should care for them." Displeased with the conversation, the shopowner moved away. His customers stirred, disturbed by unaccustomed voices. "We pay them well, don't we?" He fixed a needle in the arm of a customer who sank back into waiting plush arms with a blissful smile.

"I don't think they care about the pay," Dario murmured, half to himself.

Stories of the strangers stirred Dario more than any chronicle of the city. He knew that the strangers and a handful of others like them did the fighting for the cities because they didn't seem to care about being hurt,

because they didn't fear talking about death.

(The social theorists explained it: "This carelessness, this refusal to seek a happier way is an imbalance in personality. There will always be a few men who refuse to think about the safer way. It is to the advantage of society to use them to defend any necessary causes, to fight any battles that may be needed.")

Men's longing for comfort and a happier way had banished wars centuries before. Spirit had died with the last conflict. Now citizens lived for themselves and their comfort was confined in shimmering tubes and flasks of life fluid.

("Society uses these warriors," the theorists said. "It is the best way for the common good. The imbalance of a few benefits the many.")

As a small child, Dario had run in the streets to catch a glimpse of the strangers, ripping away from his mother's hands because he knew she would be too frightened to follow him into the street. Later, he had read everything that had ever been written about them.

He was sixteen now, and he wanted to join them.

"What do you mean, asking so many questions about the strangers?" The shopkeeper stood behind Dario. He looked tall and suspicious. "Kid your age shouldn't be out at all."

"I—I'm older than I look." Dario began to back toward the door. "You—er—don't happen to know where the strangers are going after battle, do you?"

"Grangeport, maybe. If they don't all get killed." The shopkeeper moved toward Dario. "Are you traveling without a pass card, kid?"

"Ah—me?" Dario ducked under an apparatus which fed life fluid into a customer's veins through a thin transparent tube.

The shopkeeper lunged for him.

"G'bye!" Dario said, louder than

he'd ever spoken in his life, and ducked out the door.

Startled by the noise, the customers started to their feet, crashing bottles and shining tubes to the floor. The shopkeeper fell against the door in a pile of apparatus and shimmering, snaky pipes.

Frightened by the sound of his own voice, Dario ran. He crossed the city conveyer belt and ducked out into the street. Panting at the sudden rush of air in his lungs, he slowed down after his first dash, jogging a few feet before he collapsed on a curbstone. He held his elbows against his ribs and stared up the street that led to Grangeport. If he followed the strangers long enough, they would notice him—few people walked out in the open these days. Few left their homes for any reason, whether they lived in hives along the inter-city roadways or in the grim grey monoliths of the city.

None of the books told a man how he could join. If he could get the strangers to notice him, Dario thought, it might be all that was needed. Perhaps silent Charles would see him concealed in the corner of a square just before the next battle. Perhaps Danton or fat Grimm would fall and Dario could rush to take his place. Perhaps Charles would be wounded and left where Dario could find him and help him get well. Perhaps asking would be all it would take.

"You'll have to prove yourself if you want to join the strangers."

Dario jumped. He had never heard a city person talk so loud before. In the weeks since he had left his own city he had passed only a few in the streets; they had hustled by, grey-faced, without speaking, scuttling into doorways to ride on conveyer belts that girdled the inner cities.

"I said you'll have to prove yourself." A rotund shy-looking man smiled tentatively and sat down next

to Dario, stretching his short legs into the street and looking thoughtfully at his toes.

"You knew where I was going," Dario answered him naturally. The man was too gentle-looking to frighten him.

"I ought to, son. I've looked down many a road in just that way." Humming ruefully, the newcomer settled himself on the curb. "I once thought I would join them."

"Wouldn't they let you?"

The little man poked in the pockets of his grey tunic and came up with a sweet bar. He offered some to Dario. "My name is Andrew Warden," he said as Dario took it and ate. "We'd better get moving if you're going to follow the strangers to the next town."

Dario was glad to have company. Andrew didn't talk much as they followed the straight road out of the city, but he hummed to himself and Dario recognized snatches of a song he had heard when he was a child, about a boy who left the cities to seek his fortune. Dario went in silence. It was better not to travel and if you had to it was better not to be heard at all. There were no police now, but people in the cities and along the roadways were suspicious, and Dario had heard tales of city people venturing out in packs to snatch travelers and take them indoors to the better, more comfortable life.

On their way to Grangeport, Dario and Andrew passed a battlefield; a man lay on it, arms crossed on his chest, weapons laid around him. Near him, a blackened mound smoked. Charred bones stuck out from it at crazy angles. The enemy. As they drew abreast of the battlefield, Dario looked with detachment at the sleeping stranger. The sunlight seemed to have faded from his tunic; it was dirtied by brown smears and more brown stuff lay around him in pools. It was thick-necked Danton.

"Now there are six," Dario murmured to himself.

"That is death, Dario. Are you sure you want to join the strangers?" Andrew looked almost as if he wanted to cry.

Dario spoke a little scornfully. "Is that why they turned you down? Were you afraid of dying?" He quickened his step. "There are six now. They may need me." He turned to Andrew. "You don't have to come with me, you know."

Andrew's face was sad but he managed a smile at Dario's impatience. "Let me come, Dario. I may be able to do something for you."

"Let's go, then. Oh, Andrew, maybe they'll take me in." Dario skipped for a step or two and then settled down to walking.

They went for several days before they reached Grangeport. In gullies at the side of the road they slept and talked. Dario told Andrew how he had sneaked away from home to follow the strangers after they had done battle for his home city. Hidden, he had watched them rescue the daughter of the mayor from another band. He had seen the mayor and a delegation walk across a field—in the open, despite the fear they felt in the open sunlight—to pay tribute. He had thought of his home and the school where everything was soft and comfortable and no one asked a boy to do anything that might be hard for him and he had left his hiding-place to follow the strangers without giving another thought to his mother or his teacher or the uniform attractiveness of his home.

Andrew talked about the strangers, telling new stories about the bravery of Alaric and Daniel and the wisdom of Charles. He never talked about the time when he had hoped to join them, but he told Dario that he had vowed to live outside, traveling in the open and on his own, exposing himself to difficult and uncomfortable things.

He had made the vow even after he had known he could never join the strangers.

"It's more like living, my boy." Andrew's eyes got wide. "You know—I've gotten more—life—out of falling and hurting myself or being tired or taking food from a field and eating it without any sort of covering than I ever got from the weekly flask of life fluid."

"I—I wasn't going to tell you, but I stopped going in for life fluid after the third city I visited. I haven't had any since." Dario dropped his head, almost shameful.

"It's the only way to learn joy, my boy."

"What?"

"We'd better get moving." Smoothing his tunic over his round belly, Andrew got to his feet and started walking. "There's a food field up the road a bit, and we want to get there in time for supper."

On the far side of Grangeport, close enough to the strangers to see the intricate windings of their knots of hair, Dario watched a battle for the first time. Andrew showed him how to hide in bushes at the edge of the battlefield, and the two lay in silence while the strangers fought the champions of another city.

"The strangers always win," Dario whispered, eyes shining. He didn't flinch when he saw Charles leap on the neck of a champion and inflict death.

"Shhhh, my boy." Andrew touched his arm. "It's not time for them to see you."

"When the first champion fell, the battle was over. Roaring curses, the champions took a final few vicious swipes at Charles and his men, then ran for the edge of the field.

Howling in exuberance, Charles and wiry Anter and fat Grimm chased them to the road. When one of the champions fell they kicked him and stamped on his body. When Dario

thought the fallen man must be already dead the strangers stood back and let him run for the city.

"Why didn't they kill him?" Flushed with excitement, Dario was making passes with his walking stick, feinting and thrusting until the bushes in which he was hidden began to shake.

"Shhhhh, my boy." Andrew put a gentle hand on his wrists and stopped his arms from waving. "If they killed all the champions, there would be no one left to fight, and they would die or grow grey like the people in the cities."

Dario took his breath in softly, but it caught in his throat and swelled there as he thought of the gallantry of the strangers. "Ohhhh...."

Led by Charles, the strangers stood in the center of the battle-field, burning the body of the dead champion. Anter and fat Grimm stood side by side, arms about each other's shoulders. Alaric and young Daniel stood together, clashing their weapons together in a proud melody. Holding the dead Danton's boots was William, who stood quietly until the flames were highest and then threw them in. The smoke rose and curled and blackened their faces. Locked together over the fire, the strangers sang. When the flames died they broke and bounded over the field like young animals and threw themselves in the water that ran by the battlefield's edge, splashing and singing until their bodies and hearts were clean.

Dario strained against the hand Andrew kept on his arm. "Can't I go to them now and tell them I want to join?"

"Not yet, boy. If they saw you now they wouldn't stop to question you. They'd kill you." Andrew kept a gentle, persistent hand on Dario's shoulder. "They'll camp here tonight. Then we can go to them."

When the flames of the funeral pyre died, the strangers went from

the field into Grangeport. At dusk they came back with heavy sacks swinging from their shoulders. William had a woman's scarf about his neck.

"Andrew, I'm going now," Dario whispered. The strangers had opened their sacks and spread food and gems and clothing haphazardly on the ground. Dario saw Charles pick up two purple flasks—life fluid—and hurl them against a tree. He wanted to join him.

"Not yet, boy, not yet. Please!" Andrew pulled at his sleeve. "Wait until they've eaten."

"But why, Andrew?"

"Because I know them and I say so."

"All right, Andrew."

When Dario and Andrew wormed their way from beneath the bushes, it was after dark. As soon as they were free of the shrubbery, Andrew stood upright and began to talk in a slow, easy monotone that Dario imagined might be used to ease a jumpy animal.

"Charles, it's Andrew. You know me. You haven't forgotten so soon, I'm sure you haven't forgotten Andrew. I'm coming to you with a friend. I think he wants to—well, we met after the last city and we're going into Grangeport and my friend here didn't like it inside the cities, and he said so, and he tells me one day he saw you and wanted..." Andrew was still walking but suddenly his feet didn't touch the ground.

Fat Grimm had stepped from nowhere and grabbed him by the shoulders and lifted him off his feet. Wiry Anter held Dario.

"I thought," Andrew said with some dignity, "if I warned you of our coming you might not jump us like this—or shoot us before you saw who we were."

"Come to the fire," Grimm said. He stepped over piles of gems and goods which still lay on the ground and put Andrew down in front of Charles, the

leader. Still holding Dario, Anter moved up beside him.

"You," Charles said quietly. Dario couldn't read his expression.

"You haven't forgotten me." Andrew's voice was low. He stood toe to toe with the hawk, Charles, in a quiet dignity more palpable than his flapping tunic or his rotund flesh.

"Sit down, Andrew." Charles turned to Dario and his face was bright. "You wanted to see us?"

"Yes, I've—I've always wanted to... I—"

"Slowly. Drop his arms, Anter." Charles stepped back to look at the boy, eyes alight. "We wondered when you were going to come to us. When William saw you hiding in those bushes today, we knew this must be the time. You want to join us?"

"If I can't I'll follow you everywhere. I'll never go back to the cities. I'll..."

"Do you think you will be worthy?"

"I pray so."

Charles walked closer to the boy. Anter had moved away to talk with the other men who sat around the fire some distance from Andrew, who bowed his head in silence. The fire was low. In the distance the shell of Grangeport glowed greyly. The sky was deep and soft except where it touched the city. "Tell me why you left the city."

Dario was direct. "Because nobody in the city lives any more."

"How did you find out?"

"I saw a friend of mine lose a race." Still tense, Dario talked fast, leaning forward slightly. "It must have been some sort of mistake. I didn't think they let things like that happen in the cities, but I raced with my friend and my friend lost the race."

"Were there many others who raced?"

"About 70."

"Did they lose?" Charles looked amused.

"No, they all won." Dario stared at

the ground for a minute, remembering. "His name was Richard. We were talking about the race afterward and he said he'd lost. I told him he couldn't have. I told him nobody in the cities ever failed at anything, because nobody ever thought of failing. He looked at me strangely and he went away. I don't think he could stand losing. He threw himself out of a window." He jammed his thumbs in his belt and straightened.

"Mother told me he'd just gone out to fly, because he thought he could fly, and anything you think you can do in the cities, you can do. I looked out and he was spread on the street. Nobody wanted to go out to take care of him, because it seemed like a discomfort to go outside. He stayed there for the longest time..."

"And then you knew?" Intent, Charles stepped closer to the boy.

"I knew everything doesn't always come out all right."

"Good."

"The next week I skipped my go with the life fluid. It was funny when I did. Part of the time I thought I wanted to throw myself out a window after Richard. I kept thinking about it—everything's not always coming out all right, even when you say it will—and wishing it would all end. But the other times, when I got a look outside or sat and thought, or just felt things, I was—well, Andrew says he feels more alive stubbing his toe or being hungry or even being unhappy than he ever did when he was on the life fluid. I guess that's what I'm trying to say. It's better to be alive outside, even when things don't come out all right."

Charles' face had darkened at the mention of Andrew, and he asked the next question almost automatically. "You saw us and decided to come outside?"

"You looked so alive. Everybody who lived near us said they hated you because you were loud and wild and

foolish enough to take the harder way. I guess they couldn't understand why anybody would choose to live outside where you could get hungry or sunburned or hurt, where you could be uncomfortable. And I think they guessed..."

"Guessed?"

Dario looked as proud as a prophet who has come up with a new truth. "...that you don't always succeed outside. I think they guessed that you could lose a battle or be killed. It's been years since anybody failed at anything in the cities—or knew they did, anyway."

"Anything else?"

"I think you made them feel that they *had* failed."

"You're a good boy, Dario." Charles moved forward and put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "Now?"

"Now I want to join you."

"We'll talk about that tomorrow. Anter, get this boy something to eat. He can't have had much if he was hiding in the bushes all day." Charles turned from Dario and strode over to Andrew. He spoke to him in a low voice. Andrew, without rising, said something quiet and insistent. Charles nodded. He threw himself down by the fire, looking up only when fat Grimm aimed a heavy-toed kick at Andrew.

"Leave him alone."

"But you said yourself he could be dangerous," Grimm said peccantly.

"Leave him alone. He's tired and he can't hurt you or me." Charles looked at Andrew gravely. "You know he's never hurt anybody."

"But he almost..."

Charles started to get to his feet. "I said leave him alone." Sulkily, Grimm edged over to the fire and sat down.

By the dying fire, Dario ate. He dropped a smoking piece of game to touch William's elbow. "How about Andrew? Can't he have something too?" William hesitated, then glanced

at Charles, who nodded. Breaking off a piece of heavy bread, William put it on a square of paper with the cooked carcass of an animal Dario had never seen.

"Take this to your friend," he said to Dario. "You can sleep over there, next to him. But be ready to move fast in the morning."

Andrew smiled as Dario dropped the food in his lap and he waited for the boy to be seated before he began eating.

"You'll stay with me, Andrew?"

"Of course, boy. It is a lonely thing to want to join the strangers."

"Lonely?" Dario saw Charles and William and Anter, Alaric and Daniel and fat Grimm sitting around the fire, talking and eating in close comradeship.

"You'll see. Rest now, boy. You'll need it."

Dario had never seen Andrew look so sad.

The sunlight was bright. Dario jumped awake, moving so fast he almost burned himself on the row of blades that hung above his body, glowing with heat. Eyes wide, he settled back and lay perfectly still, not flinching as the blades dropped closer and closer to his body. He was silent as the points seared through his clothing and touched his skin. He winced at the hot pain but he did not move when, suddenly, the blades were taken away. The ordeal had begun.

Charles stood over him, magnificently ugly in sunlight that bounced off the shimmering stuff of his tunic and made sharp shadows on his face.

"You want to be one of us?"

"Yes, yes!" Dario said.

"There will be trials."

"I'm ready," Dario said.

Nearby Andrew watched, eyes heavy with pain.

"Come on," fat Grimm growled, poking his toe at Dario. "It's time we got moving."

"Let him go to the brook first,"

Charles said. "We're in no hurry."

Dario watched and then he ate. Leaving the gems and goods the Grangeport people had gathered to pay them strewn in the field, the warriors started off. Wiry Anter and fat Grimm led. Next came William, in the spot he had once shared with Danton. Charles walked alone, followed by Alaric and Daniel. At first Dario tried to walk close to the strangers, in a spot just behind Alaric and Daniel, but fat Grimm dropped out of line to give him a cuff.

"You keep your place," he growled.

Dario dropped several paces behind, where gentle Andrew was waiting. He walked in the wake of the strangers, awash in the sound of their laughter and their curs., and his head sang.

"I passed the first test," he whispered to Andrew.

"There will be more," Andrew said.

"I can pass them too."

Andrew looked at him almost covetly. "You may, my boy. You may."

"I will," Dario said.

"You will have to learn many things."

"Like what?" Dario skipped a step, happy in the sunlight.

"There will be battles—everything won't always come out all right."

"I knew that before I started."

"You'll be hurt."

"I was hurt this morning," Dario said with some pride.

"You'll have to learn to kill."

"I've seen the strangers kill. I've watched battles."

"It's..." Andrew sighed and walked a little faster. He punched a fist at his own round belly.

"It's what?" Startled, Dario looked at him.

"We'd better hurry, boy, if we're going to keep up with your long-legged friends."

It was glorious to follow the strangers through Grangeport. Dario grinned at the few grey-faced city

people who poked their heads out of doors to see the strangers who had defended their city only the day before. They watched with a strange mixture of respect and scorn, licking thin lips to hide the fear that came with watching.

When they reached the far side of Grangeport, the strangers stopped and sat on a wall within full view of the city, talking and laughing, kicking off wide-topped boots to wiggle their feet in the sunshine.

"Dario."

The boy ran to Charles. "Yes?"

"This message. Deliver it. I want it to go to Avin Winter in Grangeport. I want it to go to no one else. He cuts his hair close and remains inside, but he is one of us."

"Wh...where will I find him?"

Dario took the envelope, trying to keep Charles from seeing that his hand was shaking. "There are millions of people in the city. How will I know him?"

"You will know him."

"There are hundreds of cubicles in the city—all alike."

"Find him." Charles turned from Dario to talk to William. "You miss Danton, don't you?"

"Yes," the young man said sadly. "He was one of the finest." William, who had seemed to Dario the gentlest of them all, let his face go hard. "If I catch Jock Bainter who killed him, I will open his guts and strew them from Grangeport to the next city. I'll pull out his eyes and bounce them against his bare body. I'll powder the bones of his feet and feed them to him, and I'll..."

Dario fled.

He felt almost at home in the city, scuttling along grey streets until he came to a potion shop. He ducked inside the outer door, dodging the inner folding doors that led to the shop itself, and moved into the outside corridor that connected every building in the city. He walked for several paces

before he realized the conveyer belt was already carrying him at a gentle speed. Avin Winter. He had to find Avin Winter in a city full of strangers.

He is one of us, Charles had said. If that meant anything, Avin Winter probably lived near the outside of one of the buildings, where he could see the street and the sunlight, where he didn't have to live in soft, polychromed air if he didn't want to. He might even live in one of the monoliths at the edge of the city, where he could look out and see the battles, where he could hear occasional laughter and watch the strangers go by.

Dario knew better than to ask for the man but he stopped in a potion shop, hoping he might catch one man off guard, one person who might know Avin Winter and tell him where to find him before he realized the boy was alone and without a pass and that his eyes were bright and that he smelled of the outside.

"Avin Winter? On the Cannsport side—say, you got a pass card, kid?"

Dario ducked and ran. If there were a chase it wouldn't last long. Chasing could be uncomfortable, especially if you were used to winning every race you ran and you were running after somebody who wasn't.

He stopped at several potion shops along the Cannsport road, getting just a little more information from each shop-owner. The conveyer belt outside was almost deserted. Few people went outside any more, even for life fluid. It could be delivered at your door by the same conveyer belt once or even twice a week, if you needed it. Going outside could be uncomfortable.

In the last potion shop he asked at, Dario found himself trapped in a morass of shining bottles and transparent tubes, backed against the door by a shop-owner who poised a needle above him and talked threateningly.

"I'll speak for the boy," someone

said in a quiet voice.

"Yessir." The shopkeeper moved back in deference.

"Come along, youngster." It was Avin Winter.

In Winter's cubicles Dario sat, feeling almost as if he had never left home. Each city-dweller's cubicles were the best in the city. Nobody could live happily without having the best. In Winter's cubicles, however, there was a difference. As Dario watched, the man strode across the floor and flung open a series of vents. In the sunlight, he looked a great deal like thick-necked Danton. He read the message Dario had brought, almost ignoring the boy.

"If I catch Jock Bainter who killed him, I will open his guts and strew them from Grangeport to..." Winter shook himself. "That's behind me." He smiled. "You don't understand, do you? Perhaps once you've passed the next ordeal, they'll tell you about Avin, brother of Danton, who survived the trials and lived with them and fought with them and then left them. It's too much for you to understand."

"Yessir," Dario said, wondering if the strangers would wait for him at the edge of the city.

"Well." Winter put a hand on Dario's shoulder. "You have succeeded in the second trial. You have delivered the message to a man you never saw in a city you did not know. Go back to the strangers, boy, and tell them I blessed you." He drew back. His face was grave. "If ever you leave them, come to me. There is more, you know."

"I could never leave them—they're all I've ever wanted to be."

"Tell them I blessed you."

Dario ran almost all the way to the edge of the city, even though he knew the conveyer belt was moving and he didn't have to. Exhausted, he threw himself down on the conveyer belt and let it carry him for a few squares.

Panting, he pressed his face against its rubbery surface and threw his arms wide. He was only half-surprised when he felt soft hands moving over his hair, smoothing the tensed muscles in his shoulders.

"I'm Maeve," the girl said when he looked up. She wore the filmy grey draperies all the women wore, and she touched him with the sureness of his mother, gentling him.

"I'm Dario," he said simply and turned to rest his head on her lap.

As she stroked his head and ran light fingers over his face, she hummed an easy song to him. Once or twice Dario started to get up but her arms were close and clinging as the vines which grew on the inner city walls, and she bent each time to kiss him.

"Would you like to know me better?" Her voice was as soft as a whisper, as light as dry dust.

"Maeve . . ." Sleepily Dario reached up to kiss her and saw the hypodermic and the tube and the purple flask of life fluid. He pushed her backward, off the conveyer belt, and the purple fluid spattered and ran in the gutters as Dario scrambled to his feet and hurled himself toward the edge of the city. He leaped out of double doors to the fresh air and cobbled street, never stopping until he had passed the last hill that hid him from the strangers.

Charles greeted him with pride. Andrew, sitting off by himself as the men talked and smoked, jumped to his feet and rushed toward the boy, beaming.

"You took less time than anyone ever did," Andrew said.

"From here on it should be easy." Dario stood stiffly, shoulders thrown back, in front of his friend.

"Dario, Dario." Andrew sighed.

"You may carry my water-case," fat Grimm told him somewhat ill-temperedly.

They set out for the next city.

That night, Dario wrestled with Grimm. The others sat around the campfire and laughed. The boy held his own for a few seconds and then was thrown, again and again. Charles stopped the match when Dario, covered with grass-stains and giddy with fighting, charged at Grimm for the twentieth time.

"Good," Charles said.

Dario accepted the meat William threw to him and went to the place outside the circle, where Andrew sat.

"Charles is pleased with you," the little man said, drawing his knees up under his chin.

"I could have kept going, but he stopped me." Slowly, Dario dropped into the grass.

"And you might have beaten him," Andrew said quietly.

"But he's so big . . ."

"I did."

Dario looked at the little man incredulously. There must be strength in those short limbs. "You passed that test?"

"And all the others—but the last one." Hugging his knees, Andrew stared at the ground.

"All but the last? Why not the last?"

"I think you've done well so far, boy. Now tell me what happened to you in the city."

When the fire had almost died, Charles and the others called Dario to sing and dance for them. He sang them a song he had learned in the city, one that every mother knew, about the young lad who left the cities to seek his fortune. The meaning had gone from it centuries before when the last sane men had vowed never to leave the cities, but still every mother sang it, and every boy repeated it:

*He left his mother, he left his kin
He left the city and comforts therein*

*To wander far and to wander wide
His fortune to seek o'er the country-side...*

When he finished the last verse, the men were humming. The last smoke curled up from the fire. The moon rose. Looking up from the glowing wood, Dario watched William; he was almost crying. The others were quiet, humming, perhaps remembering.

Cursing, fat Grimm jumped to his feet and bellowed a parody Dario had never heard before. By the time he reached the last verse, the others were shouting it too:

I'd leave my wench and I'd leave my gin

I'd leave my home and the troubles therein

*I'd sell my soul just to wander wide
To fight and to kill o'er the country-side...*

They laughed and they swore and they wrestled at the dead fire's edge. Bewildered, Dario edged away to the spot where his tunic was thrown and curled up on it and went to sleep.

"Andrew." They were walking again. The strangers were pushing ahead to a new battle in another city. Dario had dropped back to walk with Andrew. "Andrew, do you have to hurt to live?"

"You mean to live outside?"

"Yes." Dario was thoughtful. "Last night I think they wanted me to hurt Grimm. I know I'd fight and kill with the rest of them if they let me join the strangers, but I wonder if the strangers want to hurt each other." He walked a little faster. "Do you have to hurt to live outside, like they do?"

"You'll have to decide that for yourself," Andrew said quietly.

"Why are you coming along with

me? You know they hate you."

Andrew laughed ruefully. "I think I began watching you even before they did. I knew you were a good boy and that you wanted to join them." He looked at him seriously. "You never would have gotten to them alone."

"What makes you think so?"

"If you had come up to them by yourself, or if you had followed them and they had discovered you, they would have killed you."

They hated Andrew, Dario thought a little resentfully. They might even have been friendlier to him if it hadn't been for Andrew.

Sensing Dario's mood, Andrew went on. "Every once in a while, they send someone out from the cities, usually a man, usually somebody young. He is to get rid of the strangers or the champions—any of the warriors that go from city to city, doing fierce things nobody else wants to do—because as long as the people in the city can see and hear the strangers, they will never be completely sure they are happy. Can you understand that, my boy? I think not." Andrew paused to shake dirt from his sandal. "But you will understand this. Those people they sent out are to kill or corrupt the strangers, and the strangers will kill any man who is suspect before he has a chance. Naturally, anyone who comes from the cities is suspect."

"But they didn't kill you?"

"They knew me. One of their number first brought me to them. After—the trials—they still knew me. I came to you and brought you to them because I didn't want you to die. I'm staying with you to be sure you don't die. It is the pattern."

"And after the ordeals are over?"

"My place will not be with you. I will go away. It is the pattern."

"What pattern?"

A rock whizzed past Andrew's head, almost grazing him. Dario jumped. Ahead of them, standing

spraddle-legged in the middle of the road, fat Grimm was laughing.

In the next city, Dario fought his first battle. William and Anter stood on either side of him, cursing and swinging their weapons, shouting with wild verve, ready to drive off the champions.

Massed at the opposite end of the field were eight men clad in brilliant scarlet. They wore thongs laced about their feet and legs. Their heads were shaved. At a sign too quick for Dario to see, they lunged toward the strangers.

The fight was full of blood and noise and brightness. Dario was sure he killed one man, sliding the point of his weapon into the red folds of the garment the champion wore. Then something sharp clipped him on the side of the head. (Out of the tail of his eye he saw only fat Grimm who hesitated for a minute and then plunged past as Dario fell.)

Dario came to in a ditch at the side of the field. Andrew was throwing muddy water in his face.

"They've won now," Andrew whispered. "There will be a little more fighting, but your men have won. If you want to be one of them go out there and finish the battle."

"I—I was hit in the head."

"Yes. One of those red men was heading in to kill you, but I got you out of the way."

Painfully, Dario turned his head. "Without a weapon? He might have gotten you..."

"I had to get you out of the way or you would never have finished the battle. They have never initiated anyone who didn't finish the first battle." Andrew shook him. "Get up now, and be with them when they end the fighting."

"Thank you," Dario murmured, almost to himself, as he eased out of the ditch and ran back onto the field.

After the fight there was pyre and after the pyre there was food, cooked

on a separate fire by William and Daniel, who had gone into the city to claim the strangers' payment. After the meal, for Dario, there was fasting.

Charles took Dario to a high, bare hill on the far side of the field, where there were no shrubs and many rocks and where no grass grew.

"You fought well," Charles said, throwing two sticks on the ground.

"I was away from it for a while," Dario said haltingly.

"I knew that. Grimm hit you."

"Why?"

"Never mind. That is between Grimm and myself—and Andrew. The main thing is that you came back and finished the fight." Moving easily, Charles swept over the top of the small hill with his foot, kicking away pieces of grass, pushing rocks over any spot that looked soft. He dropped his water-case on the rocks and turned to Dario.

"You will stay here for three days. Twice William will bring you fresh water—no food. After the watch you will be ready for the final trial. Can you keep the watch or do you want to go back into the city?"

"I can try."

"You may sit at certain intervals. The men will take turns watching you and will signal when you will be permitted to sit. The rest of the time, you will stand or kneel. I'll come for you in three days." Slapping Dario's shoulder, Charles said something under his breath and turned to go.

"What?"

Lowering at Dario, he growled the phrase again. "I said I like your looks." His craggy face knotted in a scowl. "The sticks are for you to chew. They help."

"It is a lonely thing to want to be one of the strangers." Dario remembered Andrew's words as he sat and paced and stood and knelt and sat and paced and waited. In the first night he drank his water all at once, and by the time the sun was high again, he

rasped and choked and tried to spit. He took the second canteen of water, which William brought, more slowly.

In the three days and nights he spent, Dario told his life to himself over and over again. He thought of Andrew and wondered why Andrew, who had passed all the trials—but one—had never told him what had happened at the end. He thought of Avin Winters. Why had he left the strangers? Then he thought of the warriors as he had first seen them, marching in profane brilliance and in triumph through the streets of a drab city that could only hate them and stand aside as they passed and look after them in awe. He thought of silent Charles and the men who followed him and he stopped wondering about Andrew and about Avin Winters and about the strangers' corruption of the old folk song he had heard over and over again.

He blinked under hot sun and reeled in darkness as champions in flaming tunics marched around and around at the backs of his eyes and flinched and almost cried aloud inside his head as he slipped the weapon's point between red-clad ribs and felt it sink in, killing, over and over. He thought down blue-grey avenues of silence and sleep and managed to shake himself out of heavy, bolt-upright slumber before his feet began to betray him and he started dropping to the ground. He hardly noticed William, who came to him on the morning of the last day with a gurgling canteen and, seeing him dense and groggy, sloshed some water in his face, looking quickly over his shoulder to be sure none of the watchers saw the boy brighten and wake under the impact of the water. Mumbling the mother's song, he paced the last few circles, going around and around at the edge of the hillside in a sudden spiral that took him in smaller and smaller pools of rock and pebbles until finally he

stood still at the very center of the very top of the hill, almost ready to drop from weariness or weep from hunger, and looked up and saw Charles who spun before his eyes almost majestically and said, "Welcome. Rest and then the last trial."

The watch was over.

Dario slept for 24 hours. Sun was blazing above him when he stretched, rolled over in the heavy grass and woke. Fat Grimm sat beside him; the others were gone.

"About time," Grimm snorted.

Dizzy, Dario got to his feet and went to plunge his head in the brook. When the water cleared and he saw his reflection, he grinned. Soon his hair would be long enough to tie in a knot at the back of his head. He looked forward to the wide-topped boots and the heavy trousers. He tore into the bread and meat Grimm handed him and when he finished it began to look around the field.

"Where are they?"

"At camp. Did you think we lived in tfees?" Grimm took swipes at the grass with his weapon and then plunged it into the dirt.

"What am I supposed to do now?"

"Go to camp. That's where the last test is. They're getting things ready."

"And you?"

"I'm supposed to watch you. Let's get going."

As they moved off the field onto the roadway, Dario saw Andrew come out of a clump of bushes, stretching himself. He waved and started walking, keeping several yards behind Dario and Grimm.

"Can't Andrew walk with us?" Uncomfortable with the fat man, Dario looked back at his friend.

"Forget him." Grimm shoved him along. He looked back at Andrew and spat. "You're going to have plenty of other things to worry about when we get to camp."

"Oh?" Dario tried not to sound interested.

Grimm stretched his mouth in an ugly, square grin. "Now's when the fun begins." Dario moved a few paces away from the heavy, sweating man. He smelled.

"You want to be one of us, sonny? You got to learn to kill."

"I killed. That champion—the one back in the field."

"That's not real killing. You were fighting to save your own sweet skin. It's more than that. It's everything those worms back in the cities hate—and a lot more. Your pulling friend back there thought he could take it," (he spat in the road again) "—but he couldn't. You got to be wild to be a real one of us." Grimm's eyes were wide. Dario could see the whites all the way around the centers of them.

"Is that why Avin Winter left?"

"That fool. He thought he knew a better way than being one of us." Grimm spat again and moisture caught in the bristles of his big square chin. "But he just ended up going back to the cities like a dumb kid trying to find his way back into his little crib."

"What about Andrew?"

Grimm curled his stiff brows down in a tremendous frown. "I wanted to do it for the little worm, when he got to the last minute of the last trial and quit, but Avin Winter said no. Avin Winter said no." He began mincing down the road to the beat of it. "Avin Winter said no, Avin Winter said no..."

Dario was frightened. "If I—pass this last trial? What will happen then?"

Grimm remembered himself and began to cover the road in long, businesslike strides. "Then is the ceremony. The wine and the fire and the mixing of the bloods and all the rest of it, and then you get your part—" He pointed to a bangle that hung from his heavy wrist. It looked like bone. "And then Charles comes to you and says..." He paused. "Quit

asking questions, kid. Let's get going."

Dario and Grimm traveled for the rest of the day and night in silence.

They arrived at the camp at dawn. Footsore, Andrew limped behind them and threw himself on the ground at the edge of the camp circle as Grimm brought Dario in. Charles came from a long, low wooden building and greeted them. He took Dario inside the hall, where floors were covered with rich materials pilfered from cities and walls were hung with emblems taken from dead champions. Gems and gimcracks thrown carelessly into the folds on the floor rolled underfoot. At the center of the hall was a table set with seven places—at each there was a heavily crested cup.

"Eat now." Charles sat Dario at the end of the long table. "The last trial will be this evening." He said it almost sadly, and then he left Dario to eat alone in the echoing hall.

Dario ate in silence, trying not to look at the rafters where battle trophies hung, trying not to feel lonely and lost as his cup and plate made a solitary sound on the heavy table. When he finished Daniel came to him and took him to a small cabin—there were seven around the camp circle.

"You're to sleep here before the last trial. They'll call you just before sunset," Daniel said, and he went.

Danton's cabin—empty since the thick-necked stranger had been killed—might be Dario's soon. He made an almost proprietary tour of it, pausing to finger a woman's scarf hung by the single window, and then dropped on a pile of rough cushions in a corner and slept.

William brought him wine and a strong broth at sunset. He crouched in one corner of the cabin while Dario drank.

"Is it time now?"

"Time for the last trial. This is the hardest of all," William said slowly. He looked sharply out the door and

almost whispered: "Perhaps you are still a man even if you don't make this one."

"I'll make it."

"You'll make it if you have the—fierce—thing it takes to be one of us." Embarrassed, William forged out the door. "Come on," he muttered.

"You're ready for the last trial?" Charles stood before Dario. The sunset threw crazy shadows on his face.

"Yes."

They stood before a high log fence.

"Before you go into the stockade, you have to know the nature of the test and you have to accept it fully."

"I accept." Dario drew himself up.

"Wait until you know what will be asked of you."

"Yes."

"To be one of us," Charles said almost formally, "you must be able to kill at all costs. In killing you deny everything they live for in the cities.

"Your last trial will be a fight to the death. Do you accept?"

"I accept."

"Here is your weapon."

The high, pointed logs of the stockade cast dense shadows in the square where Dario found himself. In one corner of the square, he sensed someone breathing.

"I'm ready." His voice was not very strong. "Come. Come on."

He heard the clatter of a weapon as someone dropped it to the ground. A figure moved out of the shadows and came toward him, head down. If this enemy chose to drop his weapon, the trial would be easy! Dario drew his striking arm above his head. It was almost dark. The figure came closer. Straining at the darkness, Dario caught at the shape of it. His breath throbbed inside him and he let it out in a shout.

"Andrew!"

"Perhaps I may be of some use to someone after all." Head bowed, the gentle man stood before him. "You can be a stranger now, Dario. Do it

quickly, please."

Dario began to feel the strain in his arm, still upraised, ready to bring down the weapon. "You knew about this. You brought me here even though you knew."

"The brother of Charles knew what would happen when he brought me. It's part of the pattern, Dario. Now let's get it over."

"But you didn't kill him. That's why they wouldn't have you. You wouldn't kill him." Dario lowered his arm.

"No, I didn't kill the brother of Charles," Andrew said sadly. "And Avin Winter wouldn't let fat Grimm kill him, but when they dragged me out of the stockade and threw me down the hill, Charles went into the stockade and Charles killed him. It is part of the pattern, Dario."

"I can't, Andrew. I don't care what happens—I can't."

"If you want to be one of them you'll have to. Charles didn't kill because he wanted to. But he had the—fierceness—and he had to defend it for all of them, and he killed for that. He and Avin fought over that. And Charles hasn't laughed much since. His brother expected it. It was part of the pattern."

"Then I don't want to be one of them. We have to get out of here, Andrew." Dario shoved his weapon through his belt and prowled the fence of the stockade, looking for some way out. Outside, he could hear Grimm leading the men in the ballad travesty. He could smell meat cooking on the fire.

"They're getting the feast ready, Dario." Andrew bowed his head again. "Can't you get it done?"

"I'm not going to do it. They can kill me if they want to, but I'm not going to do it." Suddenly Dario grabbed at Andrew's shoulder. The gate opened for a second and one of the strangers moved inside.

"Grimm?" Dario grasped his weap-

on. "I'll get you, Grimm. I'd like to."

"Dario. Come here." It was Charles.

Holding his breath, the boy went toward him. Andrew moved beside him, confident now.

"You aren't going to kill him, are you?" Charles sounded sad.

"No. If that's what you came in here to do, kill me instead." Dario stuck his chin out. "Go ahead."

"You won't be one of us." Charles' words were almost a sigh. "I suspected. You are a good boy." He pulled Dario to the door of the stockade and pushed him outside. He looked at Andrew for a moment in sad understanding and stepped aside so the gentle man could leave the stockade. "You couldn't kill either, could you?"

Andrew stood for a moment. "No," he said quietly. "And it has always been hard for you. Goodbye, Charles."

Brusquely the leader turned to Dario. "Go to the city, boy. Look for Avin Winter."

Followed by Andrew, Dario ran. When the men at the fireside saw them leave the shadow of the stockade and bolt for the road, they got to their feet to run after them but Charles raised his hand and, grum-

bling, they threw themselves down again by the fire.

In the morning Dario and Andrew killed and cooked a small beast and ate it.

"Where are you going now, Andrew?"

"Back to the city where I first met you. There will be others who will want to meet the strangers."

"But you may not be as lucky next time. Next time someone could kill you."

"I know." Andrew smiled. "If people want to leave the cities I must do everything I can to help them, even if they want to run with the strangers."

"But do you have to do it that way?"

"It's part of the pattern. Goodbye, Dario. If you can, find Avin Winter."

"Goodbye, Andrew."

The boy watched Andrew start off down the road. He scaled a stone across its hard surface and did a small dance on it. He felt strong and he felt happy. The whole day seemed to sing. Humming, he turned his back on the road and started across the fields in search of his fortune.

NEXT MONTH

STORIES by J. T. McINTOSH, HOWARD FAST, RANDALL GARRETT, GEORGE O. SMITH and others

and

TO MARS AND VENUS IN THE GAY NINETIES

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THE PEACEMAKERS

BY GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

LIKE ALL Pentagon offices, this one was comfortably air-conditioned. Nevertheless the sweat was running down young Commander Baker's face long before he'd finished reading his presentation. To keep his voice steady and go on reading as he watched revulsion and even horror gather in the eyes of his listeners wasn't easy—especially as all the other officers around the long table were his seniors.

Only the weather-beaten face of the Chief of Naval Operations, at the far end of the table, remained expressionless as Baker plowed grimly on to the last sentence:

"It is submitted that the military characteristics of weapon XC-34, as described in this presentation, are directly applicable to the situation which has developed in the Middle East and offer a satisfactory solution thereof."

Baker sat down, mopping his streaming forehead.

"Satisfactory!" barked the vice-ad-

miral who sat at the CNO's right. "It's sheer madness! Commander, do you realize what you're suggesting? To attack a city containing more than a hundred thousand civilians with such a weapon would blacken the good name of our country throughout the civilized world!"

Several heads nodded in quick agreement.

The CNO's eyes, weary and red-rimmed with lack of sleep, flicked round the table. No one else seemed to have anything to add to the vice-admiral's assertion.

The CNO said quietly:

"I'm afraid the good name of our country—and its influence in this troubled world—won't be helped much if two hundred Americans and Europeans, including women and children, are butchered while an American fleet lies helplessly offshore."

"We can land the Marines from the fleet," the vice-admiral retorted.

"They would have to fight their

way through more than a mile of narrow streets to reach the hotel where these folks have taken refuge," the CNO pointed out. "We'd have to provide close air support from the carriers. The Marines will suffer severe losses, even so; the townspeople are roused to fighting frenzy, and they've been well supplied with weapons by our Eastern bloc friends who stirred up this mess in the first place. The gutters would be running ankle-deep in blood by the time the Marines reached the hotel—and there's no assurance they'd get there in time. So far, the police have held the mob back. Would they go on doing so if we landed Marines? I doubt it. So we'd gain nothing except the undying hatred of the whole Moslem world. We'd be making the Eastern bloc a present of the Middle East on a silver platter. We've been over this before, gentlemen—all day yesterday. Time's running out. Do any of you have any new suggestions?"

Nobody did.

"Then the time's come for decision," snapped the CNO. "Commander Baker, how long will it take you to deliver the required quantity of weapon XC-34 at Patuxent Naval Air Station?"

"Four hours, sir. All preparations have been made," Baker answered.

"Wait, Jack!" cried the vice-admiral, rank forgotten in his anxiety. "Don't go to the President and the Secretary of Defense with this frightful proposal until you've thought it over once more. This is something the American conscience just won't stomach. Even suggesting it could cost you your commission."

"Thanks, Fred," the CNO said with a small wry smile. "It's good of you to think of me. But I've no intention of taking this matter up with the President and the Secdef. An hour ago, the Secretary sent the Joint Chiefs of Staff a Presidential directive to take all feasible measures to rescue these beleaguered folks. My

colleagues have designated me as executive agent of the JCS to carry out such measures to that end as may appear feasible. So for the time being, the responsibility is mine, and I'm in a position to give orders which will be carried out before they are likely to be questioned by higher authority. Get your munitions on their way to Patuxent, Commander. Aircraft will be waiting to take you to the Fleet."

"Aye, aye, sir," cried Baker, eyes aglow. The echo of his quick footsteps died away down the long corridor.

"Thirty hours—maybe thirty-six," said the CNO. "Let's pray Baker gets to the Fleet in time. Meanwhile, gentlemen, there's to be no talk of this to anyone, except as necessary to carry out my orders. I want maximum security precautions."

"God help you, Jack," muttered the vice-admiral. "You've assumed a terrible responsibility."

"That's what I'm wearing four stars for," the CNO snapped.

Mahmoud bin Yusuf brandished his Tommy-gun over his head and screamed "Death to the infidels! Down with the blood-sucking imperialists! Kill! Kill!"

He was jammed against the barricade by the pressure of the mob behind him. The barricade was made of paving stones hastily pried from the streets and from the sidewalks around the hotel. The stones were hard. They hurt Mahmoud's skinny chest as the screaming crowd surged against him. Mahmoud didn't mind. It was a fine thing to be the possessor of a Tommy-gun and four magazines of ball ammunition, and to be here in the very front rank of the holy crusade that would rid his native city, once and for all, of the accursed foreigners who thought themselves the lords of the world.

"Kill!" shrieked Mahmoud, and behind him a thousand voices echoed his cry.

The policemen behind the barricade fingered their rifles nervously and stared at the crowd. Nobody had tried to climb over the barricade yet. There were enough policemen who still looked as though they had the nerve to start shooting if that were tried. But a green-turbaned mullah, standing on a pile of stones, was howling maledictions at the policemen and threatening them with the vengeance of Allah and the fires of eternal damnation if they did not stand aside and permit the manifest will of Allah to be carried out. The policemen didn't look as though they enjoyed what the mullah was saying.

By tomorrow, perhaps, they wouldn't be there any more. And then—

Mahmoud bin Yusuf licked his lips as he thought of the killing and maiming—the dragging of bodies face down through the streets—and of the fair-skinned women who cowered now in hiding behind the sand-bagged windows of the hotel, there in its green park with more policemen guarding the verandah. On that same verandah, the infidels had once enjoyed themselves and ordered bus-boy Mahmoud bin Yusuf around like a mangy dog. Only last week a girl with red hair and very white shoulders had laughed at Mahmoud when he dropped a tray of cocktails because he was staring at her shoulders instead of watching where he was going. She was in the hotel now. Mahmoud had seen her before the police put the sand-bags at the windows. She was to be his share of the loot. Comrade Idris had promised that it should be so.

"Kill!" howled Mahmoud excitedly. "Why don't we kill the policemen now?"

"None of that!" cried a sharp voice. A man in khaki shirt and shorts grabbed Mahmoud by the shoulder and spun him around. His thin face was twisted with an anger from which Mahmoud recoiled. "How many times do I have to say it?" he snarled.

"There'll be no killing of policemen. The police are our brothers."

"But, Comrade Idris—" Mahmoud began.

"But nothing, you fool!" the other interrupted. "The police will be with us in due time." He grinned wolfishly. "We have plenty of time. Now that we've cut off the water supply to the hotel. Also—"

A clatter of distant explosions in the sky interrupted. From the upturned faces of the mob rose a howl of hatred. Far aloft, a plane was winging over the city. Well below it, black puff-balls marked the futile efforts of the anti-aircraft guns which had arrived with the rest of the weapons the red-flagged ships had brought.

"The guns cannot reach the accursed plane!" someone cried angrily.

"No matter," retorted Idris. "It's only taking pictures as usual. Much good pictures will do the miserable Americans out there on the sea."

"But suppose," ventured Mahmoud anxiously, "other planes come bearing bombs?"

"Yes, what then?" cried several others. The mob had forgotten their frenzy for the moment as anxiety for their skins came to the fore.

"Must I forever be repeating myself?" Idris demanded. "They don't dare use bombs. In the first place they don't believe in shedding blood; in the second, our great friends have warned them to leave us alone; and finally, if they attacked this Moslem city every Moslem from Marrakesh to Bandung would rise in arms against them. Now let us go and refresh ourselves. There is food for all at the usual places. We have frightened the police enough for this time. Tonight perhaps they will be gone. Away with you!"

Several other voices immediately took up the cry—the crowd was skillfully hustled out of the narrow street into the square beyond.

It would be good to eat, thought

Mahmoud, and there would surely be enough so that he could take some home to his wife Fatima and little Sayyid. Then he could come back in plenty of time for tonight—

He licked his lips again as he thought about tonight and the girl with the white shoulders.

From the bridge of the great carrier, the shadowy shapes of the planes on the vast flight-deck seemed to move in sinister silence, like nocturnal birds of prey condemned to stalk their quarry afoot despite their outspread wings. The signal lights of the flight-deck crew whirled, twinkled, waved as the bombers were wheeled slowly into position.

Commander Baker felt his stomach muscles tighten,

These were the planes of the low-level attack squadron—the planes whose bomb bays were already loaded with weapon XC-34. They had flown to a well-guarded friendly airfield that afternoon to transfer the weapons from the cargo planes which had brought them from Patuxent. Now they were back aboard again, refueled and ready to take off for their strike mission.

Baker had just come up to the bridge after briefing the air crews of the squadron on the technical handling of XC-34. He could still see their set faces as they had streamed out of the briefing room afterward, shouldering their flight gear. They had not looked at Baker as they passed him. As though he were somehow—unclean.

At Baker's elbow the Commander, Air Group, spoke briskly, his tone that of a man who is determined to demonstrate that no calamity can shake his poise. He had been Baker's classmate at Annapolis.

"The flare-planes are on their way," he said. "Thirty knots over the bow's ideal for the bombers. Another five minutes—"

"Damn it, Pete," cut in Baker, "why

can't I go along?"

"Because, as I've told you," the other answered, "I'd have to unload a man who has a necessary job. The AD's a nice plane, but there's no room for useless bodies."

"But I'm the one who knows—"

"You're the one who brought us these things," cut in the CAG. "Okay. You briefed the squadron. I asked you particularly whether the weapons could be handled by any well-briefed bomber crew. You said yes. Now let my boys get on with the dirty work by themselves. They'll feel maybe a little better."

He turned away as the captain of the carrier came over from huddling with the navigator at the chart-board.

"Position's about right, CAG," the skipper said. "We'd better get on with it."

"I suppose so, sir," said the CAG. He seemed to choke on the last syllable.

"Pri-flight," said the captain into a flexible mouthpiece.

"Pri-flight. Henderson," answered a muted voice.

"Strike schedule 18-11. Prepare to launch aircraft."

The order was repeated. A moment later a bull-horn down on the flight deck began barking. Two of the winged shadows moved toward the forward catapults. Now they were in position. The blast screens rose behind them.

The night air trembled with the roar of engines as the pilots revved up. The roar died to a vibrant murmur.

"Pri-flight to captain," said a squawk box. "Ready to launch."

Baker's eyes were fixed on the baton of the catapult officer, a vertical bar of light held aloft between the two planes.

Somewhere a voice said: "Launch!"

The vertical light-bar moved back and forth. Suddenly it swung down and forward as the engine-roar rose again. The shadowy wings leaped

ahead along the deck—the giant plane raced toward the carrier's blunt bow, out and up into the night.

Baker watched the second plane follow. Two more were already moving toward the catapults. There would be twelve in all.

He watched them all take off. If only he could be with them—with these youngsters who hated him for what they were doing.

"That's all," said the CAG morosely. "I hope you're as happy tomorrow as you are now."

Baker didn't answer. One of the plane-guard helicopters settled down on the deck. Beyond it, the other was coming in.

"Dear God," whispered Baker. "Please. Not for me. For all of us."

Above the descending 'copter, a bright star seemed to wink in the dark vault of heaven. Reassurance—or mockery? "Turns for twenty-two knots," the captain was saying. "Now we sweat it out."

There was no yelling in the mouth of the narrow street tonight.

The mob gathered in silence, as their leaders had bidden them. Time enough for yelling afterward.

Mahmoud bin Yusuf clutched his Tommy-gun and waited.

The word had passed from mouth to mouth that half the police had already deserted their posts and others were leaving. Soon—soon—

"Be still!" came Idris' warning. "They may drop a flare or two, as they did last night. But don't start giving tongue. Wait for my word."

As though to punctuate the order, there was a burst of brilliant white light high aloft—another—another—

Mahmoud could see the faces of the men near him very clearly in the ghastly radiance. Some snarled. Some looked frightened. Rabbits, thought Mahmoud. Hasn't Comrade Idris told you there's nothing to be afraid of—?

"Two planes! Three!" cried somebody. "More—a couple over there!"

There was an edge of panic in the man's voice.

Then suddenly the sky was filled with hundreds of flares—flares that drifted slowly earthward, so that all the city was starkly illuminated by their searching radiance. Above the flares, the whining rumble of jet engines—many engines.

Near-by a Tommygun rattled as its owner fired upward into the pitiless light.

"Take cover!" Who raised the cry, Mahmoud didn't know, but it seemed a good idea. *Something was going to happen.* The Americans weren't doing all this just to take pictures. Mahmoud found himself running. Anywhere to get away from this light.

Engines again.

More engines—big engines—flying very low and coming fast.

The roar of those engines rose until nothing else could be heard. To the terror of light was added the terror of overwhelming sound. Now the sound was overhead. Dark shadows flashed between Mahmoud and the descending flares. Dark shadows which left flickers of fire behind them: fire, and the splitting crack of sharp explosions—

Bombs. Comrade Idris had said there would be no bombs.

Mahmoud, trying to keep running, cannoned into a man who cursed him—an other fell over him as he stumbled. He got to his feet. He was still alive. Not very big bombs, then. All around him something kept going "pop-pop-pop"—not like a Tommygun, more like the breaking of many little dry sticks. The roar overhead had lessened—Mahmoud, panting, took refuge behind one of the stone lions of the fountain in the center of the square.

He didn't feel like running any more. Whatever was going to happen to him would happen anyway. He sat down on one of the stone lion's paws,

his Tommy-gun across his knees. He'd just wait here awhile. Funny. A lot of others seemed to have the same idea. All over the square he could see men sitting down—some were even lying prone on the pavement. A few wandered aimlessly, as though they didn't quite know where they were going. A jeep appeared from one of the side streets, started to cross the square, banged into a stone post and stopped with a great crunching of metal. A man got out, stood staring at the wrecked jeep for an instant, then sat down beside it. He looked like Comrade Idris. He lifted his head—he was Comrade Idris.

The planes were coming back. More fire-flickers and sharp explosions. Bombs again. Comrade Idris had said there would be no bombs.

Comrade Idris was a liar and a traitor. There were bombs, and everybody was dead. Or dying.

Mahmoud bin Yusuf lifted himself to his feet, staggered toward the jeep. Idris' chin was on his chest. He did not lift his head as Mahmoud placed the muzzle of the Tommygun against his ear and pulled the trigger.

Then Mahmoud sat down and waited for death.

The sound in the sky died. The flares died too.

After a while there were men with queer, mis-shapen heads—men who moved purposefully, with weapons in their hands—Mahmoud wanted to ask them who they were, but it didn't seem worthwhile. He sat where he was, beside the dead Idris. Presently he closed his eyes.

The telephone was ringing. Woodward tried to pretend he didn't hear it. Maybe it would stop and he could go back to sleep. One of the perils of being Paris correspondent for the Amalgamated Press was the visiting wiremen—he'd been up too late with one contingent already. The phone kept on ringing.

"All right, all right," Woodward

grabbed for the phone. "Woodward," he barked.

"This is Captain Schofield, Naval Attaché at the Embassy, said a voice.

Woodward was instantly wide awake. Schofield wouldn't call at this hour unless there was a good reason.

"Oh, hello, Captain. Glad to hear from you."

"You'll be gladder," Schofield promised. "A Navy plane is leaving Orly at 0400 hours exactly. That gives you just time to make it. An Embassy car's on the way to get you."

"Hey!" protested Woodward. "I've got a big story coming up—"

"Not as big as the one you'll get where you're going," Schofield assured him.

"Where's that?"

"Can't tell you on the phone. Take my word for it, will you?"

"Right," agreed Woodward. "I'll be out in front when the car gets here."

"Bring hot weather clothes," advised Schofield, and hung up. "That takes care of Amalgamated, the New York Courier-Gazette, United Broadcasting and three French papers," he muttered to himself. "I must say your real newsman has some kind of instinct that tells him not to waste time arguing in a case like this."

He rechecked the names on his list. If his colleagues in London, Rome and Berne had done as well, there'd be a star-studded galaxy of correspondents gathering aboard the fleet flagship sometime this forenoon.

The little minesweeper nosed in toward the dock.

The sun, high in the sky, blazed down on the white buildings of the city and on the heads of the correspondents gathered in the bows ready to go ashore. On the dock, half-a-dozen naval officers in white shirts and shorts and a couple of Marine officers in sun-tans waited, along with several darker-skinned men wearing white suits and red tarbooshes.

Behind them, a cordon of police

were holding back a considerable crowd of people who seemed mildly interested in what was going on but not at all excited.

"Hey!" cried Woodward suddenly. "Look at all the guns!"

He was pointing toward two lighters which lay at anchor a little way offshore. They were heaped high with weapons of all kinds—rifles, Tommy-guns, machine-guns, bazookas and mortars.

"We've had fifteen hundred Marines and five hundred bluejackets working all night and most of the forenoon gathering that collection," a Navy lieutenant said. "Town's pretty well clean of shooting-irons by now."

Cameras snapped and buzzed. Questions clamored.

"How'd you do it without anybody getting killed?"— "What're you going to do with all that hardware?"— "What goes on here, anyway?"

"Hold your horses, gentlemen, please!" begged the lieutenant. "The Admiral wants you to see the town and the people first. Then he'll tell you all about it, and Commander Baker'll fill you in on details. After that you can talk to the folks that were in the hotel, if the medic's let you. All right—gangway's down. This way, gentlemen."

Mahmoud bin Yusuf, again in the forefront of a crowd, watched the correspondents come down the slanting brow with a strange detached interest that had neither hatred nor even resentment mixed with it. These were infidels, foreign imperialists—what else did Comrade Idris used to call them? No matter. Mahmoud was too tired to do much thinking. He couldn't quite remember what had happened to his Tommy-gun either. Maybe he wouldn't need it any more. Somehow it seemed more important to think about getting a job and looking after Fatima and little Sayyid. When he got over being so tired. Right now he was satisfied just to stand there and look. He didn't see

Comrade Idris anywhere. There was something wrong about Comrade Idris—he was no good—what was it? Mahmoud wasn't sure, but he had a feeling he'd remember presently. He grinned at a policeman, and after a moment the policeman grinned back.

"I've given you the bare bones of the story, gentlemen," said Commander Baker. "Just to sum up—the Army Chemical Corps and the Naval Research Laboratory have been working on this gas for years. I'll give the Army most of the credit. They've had the faith to plug along when the going was tough. It was just chance that gave us the first opportunity to use it. The objective was to get a chemical agent which would incapacitate human beings for any considerable exertion—like fighting, say—but would be temporary in its action, leave no harmful after-effects, and be sufficiently persistent and penetrating so that it would last long enough to pacify any kind of disturbance and get at people inside ordinary buildings and other shelters. This was a tall order, and I'm afraid the technical details will remain pretty highly classified for quite a while. But you have seen the results. For days the people of this town—many of 'em, anyway—were out in the street screaming for blood. Quite a few of those who didn't like what was going on were killed or hurt. The whole thing seems to've been cooked up by agitators, after the Eastern bloc arms shipments arrived. The government didn't dare peep—they didn't even send troops from the capital. They were afraid for their lives. That was the state of affairs up to sundown yesterday. You've been given the details of our air operations last night—timing, number of planes used and all the rest. You see what the townsfolk are like now. On the basis of our experiments, we expect they'll be a little dazed and won't quite coordinate for another day or so. Then they'll be all right."

"And you say nobody was hurt at all last night?" asked the UBC Correspondent.

"I didn't quite say that," Baker answered. "There were a few broken bones, cuts and bruises from dazed drivers hitting walls or running off roadways. There was a little promiscuous shooting, too, and a few wounds as a result. One man was killed—somebody emptied a Tommy-gun into his head. You'll have to ask Intelligence about him. Another fellow broke his leg by falling into a cistern. Our medical people are taking care of the casualties, and we'll leave a medical staff here for a couple of weeks after we pull out the Marines—which will be tomorrow or next day. We don't expect any further trouble."

"You're flying out the folks who were in the hotel before the Marines leave, aren't you?" asked the man from the London Beacon.

"They seem to want to go," Baker answered. "And it's just as well for them to have a thorough check-up in Italy. They got some of the gas, too, of course. That's one of the nice points about XC-34—if you have to include your friends, it doesn't hurt 'em. Which is more than can be said for most modern weapons."

"Can you tell us anything about the gas-masks the Marines were wearing?" the Beacon man persisted.

"Sorry," denied Baker. "All I can say is they're special masks which we

brought along with the weapons. The longer it is before anyone else figures out how to make a mask that'll be proof against XC-34, the happier we all should be. We may need to use it again—now that it's proved itself to be a stopper but not a killer."

"What this means is, gas warfare's become respectable. Right?" Woodward asked.

"It ought to be," said Baker simply.

"What I'd like to know," Woodward went on, "is the name of the man who had the iron-clad courage to order you to go ahead and use gas against a civilian population before he knew for certain what would happen. That man should have the Congressional Medal of Honor for sheer guts, considering the unshakable prejudice against gas warfare that has become imbedded in the public mind."

"He should indeed," said Baker. "He should indeed. The prejudice you speak of has held back the development of gases like our XC-34 for too many years, and it wouldn't have been used even when we'd proved it by every conceivable test except for one man's courage. I'd like to tell you his name, gentlemen, but the privilege of doing him honor belongs at a much higher level."

"Maybe even higher than the one you're thinking of, Commander," said Woodward. "Do you remember Who it was that said, Blessed are the peacemakers?"

TABUN

British papers were reporting, as we went to press, how divers, aided by television cameras, were beginning the most dangerous salvage operation off West German shores since the war. They were recovering 80,000 poison gas shells containing "tabun", the last secret weapon of the Nazis, an extremely powerful nerve-paralysing gas which Hitler had hoped to use. A thousandth of a gramme of tabun was sufficient to kill. Seawater had eaten away the metal containers and their aluminum fuses since the ships carrying them were scuttled near the Danish coast. If the shells should leak or explode, a number of towns along the German-Danish border would be in peril, since tabun is soluble in water. Hence this project to salvage the shells and then cement them in non-corroding metal containers which would then be dropped into the Atlantic.

THE WATERS OF DEATH

BY LESTER DEL REY

WHEN I was a kid, I used to listen to a bunch of purported ancient legends told to me by an old Chippewa Indian, and one of them strikes me now as a rather nice piece of prophecy. I can't vouch for the truth of the story as a legend, however. Old John was an excellent trapper, a graduate of one of our finest colleges, and an incurably romantic liar about the past of his people. He even swapped bits of Dante and told them to me as part of the afterlife of his traditions. But maybe this was authentic, and maybe it doesn't matter.

It seems that the moon has always been secretly in love with the sun, but has been content to wait her time, since she has no rival. But in the days to come (or the past, often confused in Old John's tales), men will build a great fire, which shall be higher than the mountains, and shall glow with a new passion meant to trap the sun with magic. And the sun will begin to respond, dropping lower and lower to meet passion with pas-

sion. Then the moon will awake from her silent dreams and will act before the traps that men have laid can capture the blazing orb of heaven.

She shall tilt in her anger until the waters of death shall spill from her and shall fall in a great rain on the Earth. The blazing fire of men shall be quenched, but her anger shall not be sated, and the waters of death shall fall for a thousand months and a day. The Earth shall glow by night with the cold fire of the moon, and death shall come to all life. There shall be no place to hide, even for the spirits of the dead. The mountains shall wash into the rivers, and the seas shall drink up the plains. The waters of death shall dissolve all the Earth, until the moon mates with the sun and gives birth to a new Earth.

I used to think it a quaint version of the inevitable end of creation so common to religions and folk-tales. Now I'm not so amused. The waters of death that glow by night with cold

fire and wipe out all life without permitting a hiding place are no longer so distant. I keep reading about them in scientific reports, though they're now rigged up with additional data on roentgens, fall-out, fission wastes, and maximum permissible dosages—the latter term being far more mythical than any previous legends.

I've just finished reading the Introduction and Summary of the report issued by the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy. This should be about the most cheerful piece of honest investigation into the dangers from atomic radiation and our current policy. There can be little question of the honesty of the investigation—but there is equally little doubt about the deliberate effort made to supply the most optimistic data to the investigators. Yet in spite of the hopeful tone of the headlines, the summary given is optimistic only in the sense of saying we aren't dead yet.

Essentially, the report covers *only* the situation on atomic fall-out, with no attention paid to peacetime uses of the atom—which is like talking of mortality figures only in terms of war deaths. But even here, the total picture given is far from reassuring. Fall-out danger will reach its maximum (if no further bomb tests are carried out) in 1962-1965, yet already some sections of the country have exceeded safe levels in Strontium-90 units detected in milk and grain. There are indications that in some cases, plants pick up the deadly isotope directly, without its going through the soil. The report admits that we still don't really know the biological effects of radiation, nor the significance of local hot-spots. It states that the hitherto rarely mentioned danger from Carbon-14 may be greater than that from Strontium-90, and that caesium-137 and iodine-131, as well as many other shortlived isotopes present a further grave danger, perhaps beyond that

of strontium; this danger may be far worse in the case of damage to future generations through mutations. It indicates that our figures for maximum permissible dose, and maximum permissible concentration are by no means reliable. It says that two generations of bomb-testing at the level of intermittent present rates may produce a radiation level considered dangerous to all life. And it finishes by stating that there has so far been only inadequate study of the biological aspects of fall-out.

This is a report which comparatively sane and careful newspapers like the *New York Times* are headlining in cheerful terms!

Gentlemen, your skulls are showing!

Inevitably, this report had to be prepared from material which mostly came directly or indirectly from data made available through the Atomic Energy Commission. Even the scientists who testified and who were not directly employed by any A. E. C. branch were not free to oppose the official stand. Isotopes for study come from A. E. C. controlled reactors. Most study programs are given out or approved by the A. E. C. All clearances for scientists who do any work on atoms which involves any degree of secrecy must come from the A. E. C., and the field of atomics is more riddled with secrecy restrictions than any other. And, of course, the A. E. C. itself was automatically in a more authoritative position than that of any dissenting scientists.

Parenthetically, there's a cute dodge that can be used to make non-A. E. C. conformity seemed unwarranted, as is shown in the case of Dr. Linus Pauling, one of our greatest authorities on the biological results of radiation. If a scientist cries out that there is danger, this obviously plays into the hands of the Russians, who are naturally claiming that we are trying to kill the world; it can't

do other than discredit our major atomic authority and give comfort to the enemy. Therefore, the man isn't loyal to us—and therefore, we must take what he says as suspect. No matter how much more correct he may be than anyone else, he must be treated as being incorrect. It's a sweet and unavoidable effect that will reduce the objectivity of any congressional investigation, since congressmen cannot be themselves authorities on specialized fields of science. The result is that what should be a pure weighing of facts becomes a weighing of facts-cum-politics—and therefore plays into the A. E. C. position.

The amazing thing about the report just issued is that it is as honest as it is. I have nothing but the highest regard for the men who tried to present what they could learn of the situation.

There were some things which were not covered, of course, but which must be considered whenever a major portion of information comes through such official channels.

One of these factors is the fact that up to now, the official position on fallout and radiation damage of the A. E. C. has been proved wrong, by subsequent admissions of the A. E. C. itself. This does not mean that anyone is lying or trying deliberately to mislead the public. Inevitably, men engaged in making dangerous material tend to overestimate the value of what they do and minimize the danger, just as all of us tend to justify ourselves; this is so normal that none of us can be free from some loading of the evidence. But it does mean that the public has every right to regard the A.E.C. position as that which is the most highly optimistic that it is possible to take, and almost certainly too optimistic.

Furthermore, since we have observed in the past that there is a serious delay between the realization of error and the final release of this

fact to the public, we cannot be sure that the evidence presented to the investigators was even as realistic as the current thinking of the scientists connected with the A. E. C.

We can be sure that in the past we were given figures for the maximum permissible concentration which have consistently been lowered by proof that the old figures were grossly unsafe! We should be currently aware of the positive assurance that fallout would not take place immediately, but would be held in the air for five to ten years, while many short-lived isotopes decayed completely—and which we now know to be pure nonsense, since the fallout occurs within a year or less, and the short-lived isotopes simply don't have time to decay.

Yet, without considering anything beyond the dangers from fallout produced by bomb testing and with evidence that must be highly weighted on the wildly optimistic side, the report tells us that we're in some danger, and that we don't even know how great the danger is, because our official A. E. C. hasn't given adequate study to this.

Gentlemen, your skulls are glowing!

The newspapers these days carry all sorts of interesting little items, incidentally, as well as official reports. There is nothing in them to frighten the normal reader, of course; our press is far too considerate of us to frighten us or to risk the horrible danger of the public becoming panic-stricken by unpleasant facts. Hence, there is no danger in reading all the news in print—if you consider psychological danger, that is, and disregard the tragic bullets that may be riddling your body with death while your mind is protected by ethical editorship.

Recently, I noticed that our first atomic-powered submarine, the *Nutilus*, had suffered some damages. It seems she had sprung a leak of some

kind—affecting the engine-room. Nobody printed a diagram, or said precisely what was going on. But we do know that here the engine-room involves an atomic reactor, and that atomic reactors are water-cooled in submarines.

I cannot say that there was any radioactive contamination being released into the waters around the *Nautilus* as a result of this accident. Perhaps no such thing was happening. But the account I read did not stress the absence of such contamination, which was a little surprising.

It should be remembered that some time ago, when one of our atomic-powered subs wanted to put into a foreign dock it was refused permission. The nation involved declared that there was too much risk of radioactive poisoning of the waters to permit taking such chances. Now this was a nation usually very much favorable to the United States, and this "unwarranted" decision came as quite a shock to our editorial writers. At that time, much stress was placed on the fact that there was absolutely no danger whatsoever of such contamination.

I'm a little surprised that no similar assurance was included in the account of the leak in the engine compartment this time.

I'm also a trifle concerned about the fact that such leaks occur in vessels designed to travel through the seas with highly active atomic reactors at work inside. Even if there was no contamination this time, doesn't it seem possible that some future leak may present dangers? And isn't it conceivable that those countries which refuse admittance to our atomic subs may be acting on more than mere superstitious fear of radiation? Some of the best work in the world on the dangers of radiation is being done by Scandinavian scientists, and I'm beginning to think that the Scandinavian governments may be acting in the light of information

provided by their scientists, rather than on superstition. Maybe it would be worthwhile to investigate more fully the reasons for refusing us harbor privileges. Or maybe editorial ethics makes this impossible to the newspapers which so commendably insulate us from facts which might endanger us psychologically!

Of course, in the event of a full-blown nuclear war, the danger of sea contamination might not matter. But there is so little subtlety to the dangers of fully atomicized warfare that it may be possible to avoid this folly, even though limited warfare should take place. In that case, contamination of our seas by any means becomes important.

The prospect of two or more fleets of atomic submarines must then be considered, particularly since such ships must inevitably play the major part of future naval activity. The science fiction idea of submarine tug plus huge tow-tank advanced by Herbert in his novel, "Under Pressure", is now being developed for use by our own service. This means a huge number of undersea vessels, powered by atomic reactors.

War—even war without atomic bombs—presents a radiation hazard from such vessels. The task of sinking such vessels becomes one of the major goals. To sink them permanently means to damage them by explosion, mostly. Now it would be difficult for even the finest defender of ultimate safety in the newspapers to convince me that the reactor alone, of all parts of a submarine, could not be ripped open to the sea. And if it is laid open, obviously there is a rich source of radioactive materials for the waters to leech out and turn into potential death.

How dangerous is radioactive material in the sea, though? We think of the vast area of the ocean, going down to depths of many miles, and automatically assume that an impossible amount of isotopic debris would

be needed to make any appreciable difference. Yet the figures we have indicate that such may not be the case.

The report from the Committee gives us more interesting material on this line. In footnotes, we find that incredibly tiny amounts of Strontium-90 are needed to produce more than the maximum permissible dosage.

The old (and possibly outdated) International Commission for Radiological Protection figure was 67 strontium units per person as a maximum for the general population. Now, a strontium unit (once euphemistically referred to as a "sunshine unit" by some cheerful cherub culled from Madison Avenue to write official releases) was one micro-microcurie, with the curie a measure of radiation given off by one gram of radium. As such, it tells us very little. Let's take those figures into the realm of what we can appreciate.

First, let's assume a population of three billion for the world, and provide every single person with a maximum dose. (We will do this on paper only; if others are doing so in reality, it isn't for our information.) Now, we find that we have two tenths of a single curie dosage needed—one fifth of a curie to provide maximum dosage for every man, woman and child on Earth!

Let us make further assumptions on the wildly optimistic side. First, assume there is no other source of radiation. Then assume that strontium is only 40% as active as radium. This is not so, of course, since radium decays more slowly than strontium, taking 1600 years as its half-life—and hence, during any given period of time, provides less activity than the same amount of strontium by a very large figure. But let us pretend.

At such unrealistically safe figures one gram of strontium-90 then would provide twice the maximum

safe dosage for the entire human population of the globe. This means a measure equal to about 1/30 of an ounce, or 1/500 of a pound!

There is no way of estimating the poundage of radioactive material available from the sunken and exposed reactor of a sub. The natural uranium or plutonium decays slowly, and is comparatively inactive, but the partly used fuel will contain all kinds of breakdown wastes, including all the isotopes mentioned. Nor can I find any record of the amount of radioactive waste which has already been disposed of into the ocean, though again we deal in pounds—not in mere micro-micrograms.

For a time, this didn't concern the scientists too much, because they had a nice, comfortable theory, based on obvious facts. The cool water at the deep, remote bottom of the ocean is heavier than the warm water at the surface—not much, of course, but measurably. (Water grows slightly more dense down to about 39° F., then begins to expand again.) Hence, it should tend to stay at the bottom. And the sun's rays will warm only the top, while waves don't reach down very far. Therefore, wastes dumped on the bottom should remain there long enough for most of them to decay beyond the danger point.

Unfortunately, as our newspapers have told us in their meager science reporting in the past few years, this just ain't so nohow! Both the atmosphere and the ocean fail to cooperate. The cold air at the poles rises and the hot air at the tropics sinks—or at least the upper wind currents act that way, blowing arctic bomb-test products rapidly over the world and refusing to lift the tropical bomb-test products far enough to stay suspended. Likewise, the waters of the earth refuse to stay in nice, separate layers, but act beyond all reasonable theories.

Apparently, from numerous results

—including studies of the ocean off the coast of Peru—there is a mixing of the top and bottom within as little time as seven years, at least. On some occasions, there isn't a mere mixing, but the bottom seems to rise strongly, displacing the top layers of water. All that goes down must surely come up.

It's as if there were a rule in nature that says: Whenever there's a logical reason to assume nuclear handling will be safe, there shall be provided a bugger factor that will make the answer come out to maximum danger. Maybe we shouldn't blame the officials. Nobody could expect every error to work against us, instead of cancelling out. Still, I wonder if such an expectation shouldn't be made when dealing with unknown but horrible dangers against unknown but doubtful need.

More cheerful news in the papers concerns our pleasure in making excellent progress in our power reactor program. It now seems that we are really in business there, and that we're going ahead with our program faster than ever. This, of course, means that we're turning more and more comparatively harmless uranium and thorium into extraordinarily dangerous wastes. (And, of course, the wastes from violent decay in a bomb are no greater—if more spectacular—than those from slow decay in a reactor.)

So we're going to have a great deal of radioactive matter to get rid of, as might have been expected—certainly more than what there was when I wrote a previous article on the subject. Progress shines brightly upon us, it seems.

Now, on land, there is a possible—though not too practical—method of decreasing the intake by plants of strontium-90. (This does little good in the case of perhaps even more deadly isotopes, however.) If the soil is made sufficiently overrich with calcium, the plants draw in a lesser

amount of the related strontium. But in the sea, this is no help at all. It would indeed be a herculean task to add appreciably to the percentage of calcium in the sea.

Yet life in the sea is well designed to concentrate the dangerous elements. The waters are literally filled with tiny plant life, which grows wildly, sucking in the needed calcium and the equally tasty strontium. The animal life then concentrates this even more. Think of the sea-shells you'll find scattered along a beach, and then remember that the basic ingredient of these is calcium. You begin to get some idea of how eagerly the sea life uses anything like calcium.

And the seas are still of vast importance to mankind. Fish, mostly from the sea, is the main protein source for a large portion of our population. It is even a religious necessity to many who may even have other meats available.

One of the greatest commercial empires of the past was the Hanseatic League of Northern Europe. It rose to power and declined to nothing because of a single type of fish—the herring. When the herring was common, the League flourished; when the herring changed its territory, the League went out of effective existence.

Today, with the population much greater, the need for such a source of food is increasing, rather than declining. Japan, for instance, depends so heavily on fish that existence for tens of millions of people would be nearly impossible without the food of the sea.

Even other food depends on the sea. The produce from the oceans which "cannot be eaten by men is turned² into fertilizer, and spread on the land. Here, we have concentration of isotopes at its worst. The sea plants concentrate the danger, the sea animals of tiny size reconcentrate it, the larger fish add another stage

and are caught by men. Then the bones, scales, and other areas of highest concentration are ground and used by men as fertilizer. Now plants concentrating this, are fed to animals for another cycle, and then the animal products may be fed to growing children to add to their permanent bones, and to irradiate them internally throughout the days of their life.

How many pounds (and even tons) of deadly isotopes must be spread into the seas before the level is reached where each fish shall be able to pick up one millionth of a millionth of a gram—which is one five-hundredth of a pound? Nobody knows, of course. How many of such fish may a man eat before his body contains 67 times the amount in a single fish? Obviously, not too many. How many fish have you eaten—counting other sea creatures, of course—since you were born? How much cod-liver oil did you imbibe? How much ocean-produced fertilizer was used on the food you ate? And, of course, you and I belong to one of the nations which eats comparatively little fish.

This leaves out the question of mutability of sea life—and that must not be eliminated, since the oceans cover vastly more territory than the land, and since almost all of the ocean may be considered fertile, whereas much of the land is arid or sterile.

Man, probably, is less subject to mutation than many other forms of life. The scientists dearly love the tiny fly they use for experiments because of its ease of mutation, as well as its short life. Mice also mutate easily. In fact, the percentage of sports, freaks, or mutations—call them what you will—is low for men, and quite high for plants. (Several simple chemicals can so upset the plant chromosomes that the results will be freakish.)

No study that I can find has been made of the maximum safe concen-

tration for algae, plankton, etc. It should be made, and without delay. It should also be made in the presence of molluscs and other shell-fish—particularly the tiny specimens so common—to give a fair trial.

Remember again the amount of calcium—and hence, of strontium to be possibly absorbed—that is involved in many shells; often these shells equal or exceed the total other weight of the animal. Remember also that a single sea animal may produce quite a few shells to be shed and regrown in the course of a life.

Each such shell would constitute a strong local hot-spot of high radiation levels against the general background of the sea. But the shells don't necessarily come in singletions. Aside from those that may drift together, there are huge deposits where colonies of shell-fish live in tight groups, as in the oyster beds. True, the shells may crumble, but the radioactive isotopes will remain there, as active as ever. Such a bed of shells isn't a hot spot, but literally a hot bed. And the surrounding plant life will be richly dosed with mutation-inducing radiation.

One interesting mutation that might well develop and which might even prove of high survival value in such a situation would be a plant which preferred strontium to calcium, and which went through life actively seeking out and deliberately concentrating the strontium (or whatever other tasty death-isotopes lay near). This would enrich the mutation sources for the local animals, and probably eventually result in the survival of animal forms which also preferred strontium.

Gentlemen, your shells are glowing.

There are numerous other charming speculations that may very well prove true. Some intermediate stage of life might very well be mutated out of existence, with the eventual death of most of the larger forms of

sea life—and by larger I mean anything big enough to serve as human food. Or the plant life of the seas might not be able to take the concentration of radiation, and mostly die off.

What that would do to Earth is hard to guess. But since we depend on the sea plants as well as land plants to control the level of oxygen versus carbon-dioxide in the air, and since the seas are so much greater in expanse than the land, the results of such a tragedy would certainly prove catastrophic, aside from the end of all our sea sources of food and fertilizer.

As the report of the investigators points out, carbon-14 may eventually prove to be of far greater danger than strontium to life. With a half-life of 5600 years, its decay is so slow that we may consider (within any human terms) that its increase is in direct ratio to its production, with no levelling off at all.

Carbon, however, is the very basis of life. Together with hydrogen and oxygen, it is the essential element in all living tissue, and its ability to form valence bonds with itself in chains and to unite with almost all other elements which form compounds is vitally necessary to life. It will automatically be concentrated in all tissues, not merely in the bones, shells, or some local organ.

Furthermore, there is an intermixing here between the sea and the land that cannot be stopped. Sea life and land life both go through a process of changing oxygen and carbon compounds to other compounds and carbon-dioxide and back again. The carbon-dioxide is a gas, partially soluble in water, constantly going into and out of the water out of and into the air around us.

Of course, there may have been experiments and tests made of the results of radioactive wastes and fall-out on the sea life. I don't know of any, but I've often found that un-

pleasant facts only came to light by accident, or when the course of events had gone so far—as in the case of fall-out—that some measure of truth had to be given to the public.

If none have been made, I suggest that a fifty year study be begun at once, and that all needless nuclear production of isotopes for bombs or for power be halted until the full study can be completed. This seems like a reasonable period to devote to making sure there will be no end to the sea's life; after all, something that has taken a billion years to develop to its present form should merit at least that small number of years of study as protection against its end within a generation!

Quite possibly some such study is being made today in Japan. Over there, they had a fine example of what fall-out can do. The *Lucky Dragon* was bombarded with ash from a bomb calculated at the time to be a safe distance away; true, the ship was in proscribed waters, but the estimates should surely have insured its safety, if we are to trust our official estimates. The men who suffered violent radiation damage were spectacular news to the Japanese; but the fish were even more spectacularly appalling.

Since then, Japan has been making a careful study of the level of activity to be found in the catch of fish. You won't find much of this in the newspapers directly, but you will see the results. Japan—for reasons carefully not stated, as a rule, in the reports—is violently protesting against our whole project of bomb testing in the Pacific—and elsewhere, for that matter. The reason, of course, is that fish being caught throughout a vast area of the Pacific are showing alarming signs of activity. I have only a few scattered bits of how much activity, but one account indicates more than the so-called maximum permissible concen-

tration of our happy little "sunshine units".

Many of these fish were not caught anywhere near bomb test areas. Many, in fact, are fish which don't normally go around in the part of the world devoted to bomb testing.

But of course, such news might not be advisable for us. When the *Lucky Dragon* incident occurred, the benevolent powers that be adopted a policy in the interest of the public which was to deny most details, distort the reasons, and then cover-up with a few gestures of diplomatic nonsense which could be reported to show our good will. Our good will, however, did not extend to the point of making necessary information available freely to Japanese doctors for immediate treatment of the afflicted sailors. Under the laws of security, this couldn't be helped. And we must be made secure, even though it kills us.

I wonder how well that security

would have endured it if the sailors had been Americans and the fish had appeared for sale on our own fish-stalls? Perhaps then we might have been shaken to the point of questioning our right to contaminate all the seas of the Earth, and to spread the waters of death in hundred and thousand curie lots. Or perhaps the seas of official complacency and of editorial ethics could have swallowed even that without more than a single, death-ridden groundswell.

We've built and we are building the fire higher than a mountain, and we've trapped the power of the sun, in a rather rude form. So far, Old John's legend has come true. Now, methinks, the moon is tilting and the waters of death are already beginning to fall. But the only comment I hear is the plaint that it's bad luck to open an umbrella indoors.

Gentlemen, I've run out of quips. It isn't funny anymore.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

References to "the extraordinarily advanced technique" used by the Russians in their photographs of the other side of the moon, have been no clue to the actual method in photographing what was described as the "Sea of Moscow", a sea of craters, and a crescent-shaped mountain ridge, the "Sovietsky Range", apparently not situated on the edge of a large "sea" as are most ranges on the hitherto seen side.

A Tass statement says that the pictures were taken during a period of 40 minutes beginning at 6 AM (Moscow Time) on October 7th. At this time the moon rocket was between the moon and the sun, and 70% of the side of the moon not visible from the earth was illuminated. Several exposures were made with what is described as a "conventional" camera. The exposed films were developed and processed automatically *in the rocket* (according to the statement) before being relayed by radio back to ground stations in the Soviet Union. The orientation of the camera towards the moon was apparently accomplished by means of an automatic "moon-seeking device" perhaps working on light reflected from the surface of the moon,—a mechanism similar to that in use in this country. Both Russian and British scientists have commented on the considerably more monotonous character of this side of the moon,—Professor Patrick Moore, described as a supporter of the "igneous" theory of the origin of the lunar craters, raising the possibility that the earth's gravitational pull may have played a part in the formation and distribution of the moon's surface features.



A TWELVEMONTH AND A DAY

BY POUL ANDERSON

AFTER the boat which went ahead to make arrangements had radioed all clear, the *Quetzal* departed orbit and swung toward the planet. Her approach was cautious, as befitted a craft in regions hardly known, and Miguel Tolteca expected a couple of hours free to watch.

He was not exactly a sybarite, but he liked to do things in style. First he dialed *Privacy* on his door, lest some friendly soul barge in to pass the time of day. Then he put Castillo's Symphony No. 2 in D Minor with Subsonics on the tapester, mixed himself a rum and conchoru, converted the bunk to a lounger, and sat down with his free hand on the controls of the outside scanner. Its screen grew black and full of wintry unwinking stars. He searched in a clockwise direction until Gwydion swam into view, a tiny disc upon darkness, the clearest blue he had ever seen.

A fist struck the door. "Oa," called Tolteca, irritated, "can you not read?" "My mistake" said the voice of Ra-

ven. "I thought you were the chief."

Tolteca swore, folded the lounger into a stool, and stepped across the tiny cabin. A momentary change in weight informed him that the *Quetzal* had put on a spurt of extra acceleration. Doubtless to dodge some meteor swarm, the engineer part of him thought. They'd be more common here than around Nuevamerica, this being a newer system... Otherwise the pseudogee held firm. The spaceship was a precision instrument.

He opened the door. "Very well, Commandant." He pronounced the hereditary title with a curtness that approached insult. "What is so 'rgent?"

Raven stood a moment watching him. Tolteca was a young man, middling tall, with wide stiffly held shoulders. His face was thin and sharp, under brown hair drawn back into the short queue customary on his planet, and the eyes were levelly aimed. However much the United Republics of Nuevamerica made of their

shiny new democracy, it meant something to stem from one of their old professional families. He wore the uniform of the Argo Astrographical Company, but that was only a simple, pleasing version of everyday garb, blue tunic, gray culottes, white stockings, and no insignia.

Raven closed the door. "By chance," he said, his tone mild again, "one of my men overheard some of yours dic-ing to settle who should debark first after you and the ship's captain."

"Well, that sounds harmless enough," said Tolteca sarcastically. "Do you expect us to observe any official pecking order?"

"No. What, um, puzzled me was, nobody mentioned my own detachment."

Tolteca raised brows. "You wanted your men to sit in on the dice game?"

"According to what my soldier re-por-ted to me, there appears to be no doctrine for planetfall and afterward."

"Well," said Tolteca, "as a simple courtesy to our hosts, Captain Utiel and I—and you, if you wish—will go out first to greet them. There's to be quite a welcoming committee, you know. But beyond that, good ylem, Commandant, what difference does it make who comes down the gangway in what order?"

Raven stood quite still. It was the common habit of Lochlanna aristocrats. They didn't stiffen; their manners never showed any rigidity, least of all at moments of importance; but their muscles seemed to go loose and their eyes glazed over with calculation. Tolteca sometimes thought that that alone made them so alien that the Namerican Revolution had always been inevitable.

Finally—thirty seconds later, but it seemed longer—Raven said: "I can see how this misunderstanding oc-curred, Sir Engineer. Your people have developed several unique institutions in the fifty years since gaining independence, and have forgotten

some of our customs. Certainly the concept of exploration, even treaty-making, as a strictly individual, com-mercial, enterprise, is not Lochlann. We have been making unconscious as-sumptions about each other. The fact that our two groups have kept so much apart on this voyage has helped maintain those errors. I offer apology."

It was not relevant, but Tolteca was driven to snap, "Why should you apologize to me? I'm doubtless also to blame."

Raven smiled. "But I am a Com-mandant of the Oakenshaw Ethnos."

As if that bland purr had attracted him, a cat stuck his head out of the Lochlanna's flowing surcoat sleeve. Ziq was a Siamese tom, big, powerful, and possessed of a temper like mer-cury fulminate. His eyes were cold blue in the brown mask. "Mneowrr," he said remindingly. Raven scratched him under the chin. Zio tilted back his head and rumbled his motor.

Tolteca gulped down an angry re-tort. Let the fellow have his superi-ori-ty complex. He struck a cigaret and smoked in short hard puffs. "Never mind all that," he said. "What's the immediate problem?"

"You must correct the wrong im-pression among your men. My troop goes out first."

"What? If you think—"

"In combat order. The spacemen stand by to lift ship if anything should go awry. When I signal all clear, then you and Captain Utiel may emerge and make your speeches. But not before."

For an instant, Tolteca could find no words. He could only stare.

Raven waited, impassive. He had the Lochlanna build, the result of many generations of a planet with one-fourth again the standard surface gravity: though tall for one of his own race he was barely of average Namerican height. Thick-boned and thick-muscled, he moved like his own

cat, a gait which had always impressed Tolteca's people as slippery and sneaking. His head was typically long, with the expected dysharmonically broad face, high cheekbones, hook nose, sallow skin which looked youthful because genetic drift had eliminated the beard. His hair, close cropped, was a cap of midnight, and his brows met above the narrow green eyes. His clothes were not precisely gaudy, but the republican simplicity of Nuevamerica found them barbaric—high-collared blouse, baggy blue trousers tucked into half boots, surcoat embroidered with twined snakes and flowers, a silver dragon brooch. Even aboard ship, Raven wore dagger and machine pistol.

"By all creation," whispered Tolteca at last. "Do you think we're on one of your stinking campaigns of conquest?"

"Routine precautions," said Raven.

"But—the first expedition here was...was welcomed like—Our own advance boat, the pilot, he was feted till he could hardly stagger!"

Raven shrugged, earning an indignant look from Zio. "They've had almost one standard year to think over what the first expedition told them. We're a long way from home in space, and even longer in time. Twelve hundred years since the breakup of the Commonwealth isolated them. The whole Empire rose and fell while they were alone on that one planet. Genetic and cultural evolution have done strange work in less time."

Tolteca dragged on his cigaret and said roughly: "Judging by all the data, those people think more like Namericans than you do."

"Indeed?"

"They have no armed forces. No police, even, in the usual sense; public service monitors is the best translation of their word. No—well, one thing we have to find out is the extent to which they do have a government. The first expedition had too

much else to learn, to establish that clearly. But beyond doubt, they haven't got much."

"Is this good?"

"By my standards, yes. Read our Constitution."

"I have done so. A noble document, for your planet." Raven paused, scowling. "If this Gwydion were remotely like any other lost colony I've ever heard of, there would be small reason for worry. Common sense alone, the knowledge that overwhelming power exists to avenge any treachery toward us, would stay them. But don't you see, when there is no evidence of internecine strife, even of crime...and yet they are obviously not simple children of nature...I can't guess what *their* common sense is like."

"I can," clipped Tolteca, "and if your bully boys swagger down the gangway first, aiming guns at people with flowers in their hands, I know what that common sense will think of us."

Raven's smile was oddly charming on that gash of a mouth. "Credit me with some tact. We will make a ceremony of it."

"Looking ridiculous at best—they don't wear uniforms on Gwydion—and transparent at worst—for they're no fools. Your suggestion is declined."

"But I assure you—"

"No, I said. Your men will debark individually, and unarmed."

Raven sighed. "As long as we are exchanging reading lists, Sir Engineer, may I recommend the articles of the expedition to you?"

"What are you slinking toward now?"

"The *Quetzal*," said Raven patiently, "is bound for Gwydion to investigate certain possibilities and, if they look hopeful, to open negotiations with the folk. Admittedly you are in charge of that. But for obvious reasons of safety, Captain Utiel has the

last word while we are in space. What you seem to have forgotten is that once we have made planetfall, a similar power becomes mine."

"Oa! If you think you can sabotage—"

"Not at all. Like Captain Utiel, I must answer for my actions at home, if you should make complaint. However, no Lochlanna officer would assume my responsibility if he were not given corresponding authority."

Tolteca nodded, sickly. He remembered now. It hadn't seemed important. The Company's operations took men and valuable ships ever deeper into this galactic sector, places where humans had never been even at the height of the Empire. The hazards were unpredictable, and an armed guard on every vessel was in itself a good idea. Then a few old women in culottes, on the Policy Board, decided that plain Namericans weren't good enough. It had to be soldiers born and bred. In these days of spreading peace, more and more Lochlanna units found themselves at loose ends and hired out. They kept pretty much aloof, on ship and in camp, and so far it hadn't worked out badly. But the Quetzal—

"If nothing else," said Raven, "I have my own men to think of, and their families at home."

"But not the future of interstellar relations?"

"If those can be jeopardized so easily, they don't seem worth caring about. My orders stand. Please instruct your men accordingly."

Raven bowed. The cat slid from his nesting place, dug claws in the coat, and sprang up on the man's shoulder. Tolteca could have sworn that the animal sneered. The door closed behind them.

A while Tolteca stood motionless. The music reached a crescendo, reminding him that he had wanted to enjoy approach. He glanced back at the screen. The ship's curving path

had brought the sun Ynis into scanner view. Its radiance stopped down by the compensator circuits, it spread corona and great wings of zodiacal light like nacre across the stars. The prominences must be spectacular too, for it was an F8 with a mass of about two Sol's and a corresponding luminosity of almost fourteen. (Being middle Population One, it was still young enough to be in the main sequence.) But at its distance, 3.7 Astronomical Units, only the disc could be seen, covering a bar ten minutes of arc. All in all, a most ordinary star. Tolteca twisted dials until he found Gwydion again.

The planet had gained apparent size, though he could still only see it as a chipped turquoise coin. Later the cloud bands and aurora should become visible, but no continents. While the first expedition had reported Gwydion to be Earthlike in astonishing detail, it was about 10% smaller and denser—to be expected of a younger world, formed when there were more heavy elements in the universe—and thus possessed less total land area, all divided into islands and archipelagos, great shallow oceans making the climate mild from pole to pole... Here came its moon, 1600 kilometers in diameter, 96,300 kilometers in orbital radius, swinging from behind the disc like a tiny hurried firefly.

Tolteca considered the backdrop with a sense of eeriness. This close, the Nebula's immense cloud of dust and gas showed us little more than a region where stars were fewer and paler. Even nearby Rho Ophiuchi was blurred. Sol, of course, was hidden even from telescopes, an insignificant yellow dwarf 200 parsecs beyond that veil, which its light would never pierce. *I wonder what's happening there*, thought Tolteca. *It's long since anyone went to Earth.*

He recollects what Raven had ordered, and cursed Raven.

The pasture where the Quetzal had

been asked to settle its giant cylinder was about five kilometers south of Instar. From the gangway Tolteca had looked widely across rolling fields, divided by hedges into meadows of intense blossom-starred green, plowland where the first delicate shoots of grain went like a breath across brown furrows, orchards and copses and scattered homes made tiny by distance. The River Camlot gleamed between trees which might almost have been poplars; Instar was red tile roofs above enclosed flower gardens. All roads across the landscape were paved, but narrow and leisurely winding. Sometimes, Tolteca felt sure, a detour had been made to preserve an ancient tree or the lovely upswelling of a hill. Eastward the land flattened, sloping down to dikes which cut off view of the sea; westward it climbed, until forested hills rose abruptly on that horizon with a few dim mountain peaks beyond, some of which looked volcanic. The sun hung just above them; you didn't notice how small it was, for it radiated too brightly and the total illumination was almost exactly one standard sol. Cumulus clouds loomed to southwest, and a low cool wind ruffled the puddles left by a recent shower.

"It is even more peaceful and beautiful than the finest places on my own planet," said Tolteca to Dawyd. "And Nuevamerica is considered extremely Earthlike."

"Thank you," replied the Gwydiona. "Though we can take little credit. The world was here, with its own intrinsic conditions, its native biochemistry and ecology, all eminently suited to human life. I understand that God wears a different face in most of the known cosmos."

"Uh—" Tolteca hesitated. The local language, as recorded by the first expedition and learned by the second before starting out, was not altogether easy for him. Like Lochlanna, it derived from Anglic, whereas the Na-

mericans had always spoken Ispanyo. Had he quite understood that business with "God"? Somehow, it didn't sound conventionally religious. But then, the secular orientation of his own society made him liable to misinterpret any theological reference.

"Yes," he said after a moment. "The variations in so-called terrestroid planets are not great from a percentage standpoint, but to human beings they make all the difference. On one continent of my own world, for example, settlement was impossible until a certain common genus of plant had been eradicated. It was harmless most of the year, but the pollen it broadcast in spring happened to contain a substance identical with botulinus toxin."

Dawyd gave him a startled look. Tolteca wondered what he had said wrong. Had he misused some local word? Of course he'd had to use his own name for the poison... "Eradicate?" murmured Dawyd. "Do you mean destroyed? Entirely?" Catching himself, slipping back into the normal serene manner with what looked like practiced ease: "Well, let us not discuss technicalities right away. It was doubtless one of the Night Faces." He took his hand from the steering rod long enough to trace a sign in the air.

Tolteca leaned back, a trifle puzzled. The first expedition had emphasized in its reports that the Gwydiona were not superstitious, though they employed a vast amount of ceremony and symbolism. To be sure, the first expedition had landed on a different island; but it had found an identical culture wherever men dwelt. (And failed to understand why men occupied only the region between latitudes 25° and 70° N., although many other spots looked equally pleasant. There had been so much else to learn.) When the Quetzal's advance boat arrived, Instar had been suggested as the best place for the spaceship merely because it was one of the larger

towns and possessed a college with an excellent reference library.

The ceremonies of arrival weren't overwhelming, either. All Instar had turned out, men, women, and children with garlands, pipes, and lyres; and visitors had come from afar. After the formal speeches, music was played and a ballet presented, a thing with masks and thin costumes whose meaning escaped the outworlders but which made a stunning spectacle. That was all. It broke up in general cordiality; not the milling, backslapping, handshaking kind of welcome that Namericans would have given, but neither the elaborate and guarded courtesy of Lochlann. Individuals had talked in a friendly way to individuals, given invitations to stay at private homes, asked eager questions about the outside universe. And at last most of the people walked back again; but each newcomer got a ride in a small, exquisite electric automobile.

Only a nominal guard of crewmen, and a larger detachment of Lochlanna, remained with the ship. No offense had been taken at Raven's wariness, but Tolteca still smoldered.

"You will indeed abide at my house?" asked Dawyd.

Tolteca bowed in his seat. "It would be an honor, Sir—" He paused. "Forgive me, but I am not sure what your title is."

"I belong to the Simon family."

"No. I knew that. I mean, your... not your name, but what you do."

"I am a physician, of that rite which heals by songs as well as medicines." (Tolteca wondered how much he was misunderstanding.) "I also have charge of a dike patrol and instruct youth at the college."

"Oh." Tolteca was disappointed. "I thought— You are not in the government, then?"

"Why, yes. I said I am in the dike patrol. What else had you in mind?

Instar employs no Year-King or— No, that cannot be what you meant." Dawyd frowned with thought.

Tolteca watched him, as if to read what could not be said. The Gwydiona all had that basic similarity which results from a very small original group and no later immigration. The first expedition had reported a legend that their ancestors were no more than a man and two women, one dark and one blonde, survivors of an atomic blast lobbed at the colony by one of those fleets which went a-murdering during the Breakup; but records were admittedly vague. Be that as it may, this case was untypical in that there had been no degeneracy: rather, a refinement. The first generations had followed a careful program of outbreeding. To this day, the bearers of observable hereditary defects, including low intelligence and nervous instability, were sterilized, though not otherwise discriminated against.

Dawyd was a pure caucasoid, which alone proved how old his nation must be. He was tall, slender, still supple in middle age. His yellow hair, worn shoulder length, was grizzled, but the blue eyes required no contact lenses and the suntanned skin was firm. The face, clean-shaven, high of brow and strong of chin, bore a straight nose and gentle mouth. His clothes were green tunic and white cloak, golden fillet, leather sandals, a locket about his neck which was gold on one side and black on the other. A triskele was tattooed on his forehead, but gave no effect of savagery.

His language had not changed much from Anglic, the Lochlanna had learned it without difficulty. Doubtless, as usual, printed books and sound recordings had tended to stabilize it. But whereas Lochlann barked, grunted, and snarled, thought Tolteca, Gwydion trilled and sang. He had never heard such voices before.

"Ah, yes," said Dawyd. "I think I grasp your concept. Yes, my advice is often asked, even on worldwide questions. That is my pride and my humility."

"Excellent. Well, Sir Councillor, I—"

"But councillor is no...no calling. I said I was a physician."

"Wait a minute, please. You were not formally chosen in any way to... guide, advise, control—?"

"No. Why should I be? A man's reputation, good or ill, spreads. Finally others may come from halfway around the world, to ask his opinion of certain proposals." Dawyd added shrewdly, "Bear in mind, far-friend, that our whole population numbers a mere ten million, and that we have both radio and aircraft, and travel a great deal between our islands."

"But who, then, is in charge of public affairs?"

"Oh, some communities employ a Year-King, or elect presidents to manage their local meetings, or appoint an engineer to handle routine. It depends on regional tradition. Here in Instar, we lack such customs, save that we crown a Dancer each solstice, to bless the year."

"That isn't what I mean, Sir Physician. Suppose a...oh, a project, like building a new road; or a policy like, well, deciding whether to have regular relations with other planets... suppose this vague group of wise men you speak of—men who depend simply on a reputation for wisdom—suppose they decide such a question, one way or another. What happens next?"

"Then, normally, it is done as they have decided. Of course, all hear about it beforehand. If the issue is at all important, there will be much public discussion. But naturally, men will lay more weight on the suggestions of those known to be wise."

"So everyone agrees with the final decision?"

"Why not? The matter has been threshed out and the most logical answer arrived at. To be sure, a few are always unconvinced or dissatisfied. But being human, and therefore rational, they accommodate themselves to the general will."

"And—uh—funding such an enterprise?"

"That depends on its nature. A purely local enterprise, like building a new road, is carried out by the people of the community involved, with feasting and merriment each night. For larger and more specialized projects, coin may be needed, and then its collection depends on local custom. We of Instar let the Dancer go about with a sack, and all contribute as much as is reasonable."

Tolteca gave up for the time being. He was no further along than the anthropologists of the first expedition. Except, maybe that he was mentally prepared for some such answer as he'd received, and could accept it. If you had a society with a simple economic structure (automation helped marvelously in that respect, provided that the material desires of the people remained modest) and if you had a homogeneous population of high average intelligence and low average nastiness, well, then perhaps the ideal anarchic state was possible.

And it must be remembered that anarchy, in this case, did not mean amorphousness. The total culture of Gwydion was as intricate as any that men had ever evolved. Which in turn was paradoxical, since advanced science and technology usually dissolved traditions and simplified interhuman relationships. However—

Tolteca asked cautiously: "What effect do you believe contact with other planets would have on your people? Planets where things are done in radically different ways?"

"I don't know," replied Dawyd, thoughtful. "We would need more

data, and a great deal more discussion, before even attempting to foresee the consequences. I do wonder if a gradual introduction of new modes may not prove best for you."

"For us?" Tolteca was startled.

"Remember, we have lived here a long time. We know the Aspects of God or Gwydion better than you, even as we should be most careful before venturing to your home."

Tolteca could not help saying, "It's strange that you never built spaceships. I gather that your people preserved, or reconstructed, all the basic scientific knowledge of their ancestors. As soon as you had a large enough population, enough surplus wealth, you could have coupled a thermonuclear power plant to a gravity beamer and a secondary-drive pulse generator, built a hull around the ensemble, and—"

"No!"

It was almost a shout. Tolteca jerked his head around to look at Dawyd. The Gwydiona had gone quite pale.

Color flowed back after a moment. He relaxed his grip on the steering rod. But his eyes were still rigidly focused ahead of him as he answered: "We do not use atomic energy. Sunpower, waterpower, and windpower, stored in electric accumulators, are sufficient. No vehicle need be much larger or much more powerful than this car, and no community needs many vehicles."

Then they were in the town. Dawyd guided the automobile through wide straight avenues which seemed almost to contradict the vine-covered houses and peaked red roofs, the parks and splashing fountains. Tolteca noticed only one large building, a massive structure of fused stone, rearing above all chimneys with an incongruous grimness. Dawyd stopped just beyond a bridge which spanned the river in a graceful serpent shape. He had calmed down, and smiled at his guest.

"My abode. Will you enter?"

As they stepped from the bubble, a tiny scarlet bird flew from the eaves, settled on Dawyd's finger, and warbled joy. He murmured to it, grinned half awkwardly at Tolteca, and led the way to his front door, which was screened from the street by a tall bush with star-shaped leaves new for the spring season. The door's lock was sturdy but unused; Tolteca recalled again that Gwydion was apparently without crime, that its people had been hard put to understand the concept when the outworlders interviewed them. Having opened the door, Dawyd turned about and bowed very low.

"O guest of the house, who may be God, most welcome and beloved, enter. In the name of joy, and health, and understanding; beneath Ynis and She and all the stars; fire, food, fleet, and light be yours." He crossed himself, and reaching up he drew a cross on Tolteca's brow with his finger. The ritual was obviously time-worn, and yet he did not gabble it, but spoke with vast seriousness.

Entering, Tolteca noticed that the door was only faced with wood. Basically, it was a slab of steel, set in walls that were—under the stucco—two meters thick and of reinforced concrete. The windows were broad, sunlight streaming through them to glow on polished wood flooring; but each window had steel shutters. He wondered why, then forgot the matter as he watched Dawyd kneel down to light a candle before a niche. The shrine held a metal disc, half gold and half black with a bridge between, the Yin and Yang of immemorial antiquity. And still it was flanked by books, full-size and micro, with titles like, *Diagnostic Application of Bio-electric Potentials*.

Dawyd got up. "Please be seated, friend of the house. My wife went into the Night—" he hesitated—"She died, several years ago, and only one

of my daughters is unwedded. She danced for you this day, and thus is late. When she comes, we will take food."

Tolteca looked at the indicated chair. It was designed as rationally as any Namerican lounger, but made of bronze and tooled leather. He touched a fylfot recurring in the design. "I understand that all your ornamentation is symbolic. Would you explain this to me, as an example?"

"That is the Burning Wheel," answered Dawyd, "which is to say the Sun, Ynis, and all suns in the universe. The Wheel also represents Time. Thermodynamic irreversibility, if you are a psysicist," he added with a chuckle. "The interwoven vines are crisflowers, which bloom in the first haygathering season of our year and are therefore sacred to that Aspect of God called the Green Boy. Thus together they mean Time, the Destroyer and Regenerator. The leather is from the wild arcas, which belongs to the autumnal Huntress Aspect, and when she is linked with the Boy symbol it reminds us of the Night Faces and, at the same time, that the Day Faces are their other side. Bronze, being an alloy, manmade, says by forming the framework that Man embodies the meaning and structure of the world. However, since bronze turns green on corrosion, it also signifies that all structure vanishes at last, but into new life—"

He stopped and laughed. "You don't want a sermon!" he exclaimed. "Look here, do sit down. Go ahead and smoke. We already know about that custom. We can't do it ourselves—a bit of genetic drift, nicotine is too violent a poison for us—but it doesn't bother me in the least if you do. Coffee grows well on this planet, would you like a cup, or would you rather try our beer or wine? Now that we are alone for a while, I have about ten to the fiftieth questions to ask!"

That evening Raven left Instar, where he had prowled around looking, and wandered along the river road to the sea dikes. A couple of his men followed, in the byrnies and conical helmets of full battle gear; rifles were slung on their shoulders. Behind them the western hills lifted black against a sky which blazed and smoldered with gold; the river was like running metal, the light seemed to fill the air and touch every separate grass blade. Ahead, beyond trees, the eastern sky had become imperially blue and the first stars trembled.

Raven moved unhurriedly, without fear of being caught in the dark. Not on a planet with an 83-hour rotation period. He stopped for a moment at a long wooden dock where double-ended fishing craft lay tied. The sheds nearby were as solidly built as very house in town, and as gracious.

"Ketch rigged," he pointed out. "Small auxiliary engines, but I dare say those are used only when it is absolutely necessary."

"And otherwise sail?" Kors, long and gaunt, spat between his front teeth. "Now why do such a fool thing, Commandant?"

"It's more esthetically pleasing," said Raven.

"More work, though, sir," offered young Wildenvey. "I sailed a bit myself, during the Ans campaign. Just keeping all those damn ropes untangled—"

Raven grinned. "Oh, I agree. Quite. But you see, as far as I can gather, the Gwydiona don't think that way. Not like any of us visitors. A Namerican is concerned only with getting his work done, regardless of whether it really should be accomplished, and then with getting his recreation done—both with maximum bustle. A Lochlanna tries to make his work and his games approach some abstract ideal; and when he fails, he's apt to give up completely and jump over into brutishness. But they don't seem

to make such distinctions here. They say, 'Man goes where God is,' and it seems to mean that work and play and art and everything else aren't divided up, no distinction is made, it's all part of one harmonious whole. So they'll fish from sailboats with elaborately carved figureheads, each element in the pattern having a dozen different symbolic overtones; and doubtless they'll take musicians along; and they'll claim that the total effect, food-gathering plus pleasure plus artistic accomplishment plus I don't know what, is more efficiently achieved than if all those things were in neat little compartments."

He shrugged and resumed his walk. "They might be right," he finished.

"I don't know why you're worried, sir," said Kors. "They're as harmless a pack of loonies as I ever met. I swear they haven't any machine more powerful than a light tractor, no weapon more dangerous than a bow."

"The first expedition reported that they don't even go hunting, except when they must for food or to protect their crops." Raven continued for a while, unspeaking. Only the scuff of boots, chuckling river and murmur in the leaves and slowly rising thunders beyond the dike, stirred that silence. The young five-pointed leaves of a bush which grew everywhere around gave a faint green fragrance to the air. Then, far off and winding down the hills, a bronze horn blew, calling antlered cattle home.

"That's what makes me afraid," said Raven.

Thereafter the men did not venture to break his wordlessness. Once or twice they passed a Gwydiona, who hailed them gravely, but they didn't stop. When they reached the dike, Raven led the way up a staircase. The wall stretched for kilometers, set at intervals with slim towers. It was high and massive, but the long curve of it and the stone facing made it graceful. The river poured through a

gap, past a beach, into a dredged channel and a crescent-shaped bay whose waters tumbled and roared, molten in the sunset light. Raven drew his surcoat close about him; a wind blew here, chill and wet and smelling of salt. There were many gray sea birds in the sky.

"Why did they build this?" wondered Kors.

"Close moon. Big tides," said Wildenvay.

"They could have moved further up in the hills. They've room enough, for hellfire's sake. Ten million on an entire planet!"

Raven gestured at the towers. "I inquired," he said. "Tidepower generators in those. Furnish most of the local electricity. Shut up."

He stood staring out to a night horizon. The waves ramped and the sea birds mewed. His eyes were bleak with thought. Finally he sat down, took a wooden flute from his sleeve and began to play, absent-mindedly, as something to do with his hands. The music grieved, minor key beneath the wind.

Kors' bark recalled him to the world. "Halt!"

"Be still, you oaf," said Raven. "It's her planet, not yours." But his palm rested casually on the butt of his pistol as he rose.

The girl came walking along the diketop, which was planted with a velvetlike pseudomoss. She was perhaps twenty-three standard years old, slim, dressed in a white tunic and wildly fluttering blue cloak. Her hair was looped in thick yellow braids, pulled back from her forehead to show a conventionalized bird tattoo. Beneath dark brows, her eyes were violet, set far apart; the mouth and the heartshaped face were grave, but the nose tiptilted and faintly dusted with freckles. She led a boy, perhaps four, by the hand: a little male version of herself, who had been skipping but sobered when he spied the Lochlanna. Both were barefoot.

"At the crossroads of the elements, greeting," she said. Her husky voice sang the language, like all Gwydiona voices.

"Salute, peacemaker." Raven found it simplest to translate his home phrases.

"I came up here to dance for the sea," she told him, "but heard a music that called."

"Are you a shooting man?" asked the boy.

"Byord, hush!" The girl colored with embarrassment.

"Yes," laughed Raven, "you might call me a shooting man."

"But what do you shoot?" asked Byord. "Gol! Targets? Can I shoot a target?"

"Perhaps later," said Raven. "We have no targets with us at the moment."

"Mother, he says I can shoot a target! Pow! Pow! Pow!"

Raven lifted one brow. "I thought chemical weapons were unknown on Gwydion, milady," he said, as off-hand as possible.

She answered with faint distress: "That other ship, which came in winter...the men aboard it also had, what did they call them, guns. They explained and demonstrated. Since then, probably every small boy on the planet has imagined— Well, No harm done, I am sure." She ruffled Byord's hair, smiling.

"Ah... I hight Raven, a Commandant of the Oakenshaw Ethnos, Windhome Moutains, Lochlann."

"And you other souls?" asked the girl.

Raven waved them back. "Followers. Sons of yeomen on my father's estate."

She was puzzled that he excluded them, but accepted it as an alien custom. "I am Elfavy," she said, accenting the first syllable. She flashed a grin: "My son Byord you already know! His surname is Varstan, mine is Simmon."

"What?— Oh, yes, I remember.

Gwydiona wives retain their family name, sons take the father's, daughters the mother's. Am I correct? Your husband—"

She looked outward. "He drowned there, one storm last fall," she answered quietly.

Raven did not say he was sorry, for his culture had its own attitudes toward death. He couldn't help wondering aloud, tactless: "But you said you danced for the sea."

"He is of the sea now, is he not?" She continued regarding the waves, where they swirled and shook foam loose from their crests. "How beautiful it is tonight."

Then, swinging back to him, altogether at ease: "I have just had a long talk with one of your party, a Miguel Tolteca. He is staying at my father's house, where Byord and I now live."

"Not precisely one of mine," said Raven, suppressing offendedness.

"Oh? Wait...yes, he did mention having some men along from a different planet."

"Lochlann," said Raven. "Our sun lies near theirs, both about 50 light-years hence in that direction." He pointed past the evening star to the Hercules region.

"Is your home like his Nuevamerica?"

"Hardly," for a moment Raven wanted to speak of mountains which rose sheer into a red-sun sky, trees dwarfed and gnarled by wind, moorland, ice plains, oceans too dense and bitter with salt for a man to sink. He remembered a peasant's house, its roof held down by ropes lest a gale blow it away, and he remembered his father's castle gaunt above a glacier, and hoofs ringing in the courtyard, and he remembered bandits and burned villages and dead men gaping around a smashed cannon.

But she would not understand. Would she?

"Why do you have all the shooting things?" exploded from Byord. "Are

there bad animals around your farms?"

"No," said Raven. "Not many wild animals at all. The land is too poor for them."

"I have heard...that first expedition—" Elfavy grew troubled again. "They said something about men fighting other men."

"My profession," said Raven. She looked blankly at him. Wrong word, then. "My calling," he said, though that wasn't quite right either.

"But killing men!" she cried.

"Bad men?" asked Byord, round-eyed.

"Hush," said his mother. "'Bad' means when something goes wrong, like the cynwyr swarming down and eating the grain. How can men go wrong?"

"They get sick," Byord said.

"Yes, and then your grandfather heals them."

"Imagine a situation where men often get so sick they want to hurt their own kind," said Raven.

"But horrible!" Elfavy traced a cross in the air. "What germ causes that?"

Raven sighed. If she couldn't even visualize homicidal mania, how explain to her that sane, honorable men found sane, honorable reasons for hunting each other?

He heard Kors mutter to Wildenvey: "What I said, Guts of sugar candy."

If that were only so, thought Raven, he could forget his own unease. But they were no weaklings on Gwydion. Not when they took open sailboats onto oceans whose weakest tides rose fifteen meters. Not when this girl could visibly push away her own shock, face him, and ask with friendly curiosity—as if he, Raven, should address questions to the sudden apparition of a sabertoothed weaselcat:

"Is that the reason why your people and the Namericans seem to talk so little to each other? I thought I

noticed it in the town, but didn't realize who came from which group."

"Oh, they've done their share of fighting on Nuevamerica," said Raven dryly. "As when they expelled us; we had divided their planet into fiefs, a century ago. They were aided by the fact that Lochlann was simultaneously fighting the Grand Alliance—but still, it was well done of them."

"I don't see why—well, no matter. We will have time enough to discuss all this. You are going into the hills with us, are you not?"

"Why, yes, if... What did you say? You too?"

Elfavy nodded. Her mouth quirked upward. "Don't be so horrified, far-friend. I will leave Byord with his aunt and uncle, even if they do spoil him terribly." She gave the boy a brief hug. "But the group does need a dancer, which is my calling."

"Dancer?" choked Kors.

"Not the Dancer. He is always a man."

"But—" Raven relaxed. He even smiled. "In what way does an expedition into the wilderness require a dancer?"

"To dance for it," said Elfavy. "What else?"

"Oh...nothing. Do you know precisely what this journey is for?"

"You have not heard? I listened while my father and Miguel talked it over. You see, planets where men can live without special equipment are rare and far between. The explorers from Nuevamerica would like a base on Gwydion, to refuel their ships, make needful repairs, rest in greenwoods." Elfavy gave Kors and Wildenvey a surprised look, not knowing why they both laughed aloud. Raven himself would not have interrupted her naive recital for money.

She brushed the blown yellow hair off her brow and resumed, "Well, of course all our people must decide the matter. But it can do no harm meanwhile to look at possible sites for

such a base, can it? Father proposed an uninhabited valley some days' march inland, beyond Mount Granis. The journey afoot would be pleasant, much could be shown to you and discussed en route, and we would return well before Bale time."

She frowned the faintest bit. "I am not certain it is wise to have a foreign base so near the Holy City. But that can always be argued later." Her laughter trilled forth. "Oh, dear, I do ramble, don't I?" She caught Raven's arm, impulsively, and tucked her own under it. "But you have seen so many worlds, you can't imagine how we here have all looked forward to meeting you. The wonder of it! The stories you can tell us, the songs you can sing us!"

She dropped her free hand to Byord's shoulder. "Wait till this little chatterbird gets over his shyness with you, far-friend. If we could only harness his questions to a generator, we could illuminate all Instar!"

"Awww," said the boy, wriggling free.

They began to walk along the dike-top, almost aimlessly. The two soldiers followed. The rifles on their backs stood black against a cloud like roses. Elfavy's fingers slipped down from Raven's awkwardly held arm—men and women did not go together thus on Lochlann—and closed on the flute in his sleeve. "What is this?" she asked.

He drew it forth. It was a long piece of darvawood, carved and polished to bring out the grain. "I am not very good with this," he said. "A man of rank is expected to have some artistic skills. But I am only a younger son, which is why I wander about seeking work for my guns, and I have not had much musical instruction."

"The sounds I heard were—" Elfavy searched after a word. "They spoke to me," she said finally, "but not in a language I knew. Will you play that melody again?"

He set the flute to his lips and piped the notes, which were cold and sad. Elfavy shivered, catching her mantle to her and touching the gold-and-black locket at her throat. "There is more than music here," she said. "That song comes from the Night Faces. It is a song, is it not?"

"Yes. Very old. From Earth, they say, centuries before men had even left the Home. We still sing it on Lochlann."

"Can you put it into Gwydiona for me?"

"Perhaps. Let me think." He walked for a while more, turning phrases in his head. A military officer must also be adept in the use of words, and the two languages were close kin. Finally he sounded a few bars, lowered the flute, and began:

*"The wind doth blow today, my love,
And a few small drops of rain.
I never had but one true love,
And she in her grave was lain."*

*"I'll do as much for my true love
As any young man may;
I'll sit and mourn all at her grave
For a twelvemonth and a day."*

*The twelvemonth and a day being up,
The dead began to speak:
'Oh, who sits weeping on my grave
And will not let me sleep?' —"*

He felt her grow stiff, and halted his voice. She said, through an unsteady mouth, so low he could scarce hear: "No. Please."

"Forgive me," he said in puzzlement, "if I have—" What?

"You couldn't know. I couldn't." She glanced back to the soldiers. "He was out of earshot. It doesn't matter, then, much."

"Can you tell me what is wrong?" he asked, hopeful of a clue to the

source of his own doubts.

"No." She shook her head. "I don't know what. It just frightens me somehow. Horribly. How can you live with such a song?"

"On Lochlann we think it quite a beautiful little thing."

"But the dead don't speak. They are *dead*!"

"Of course. It was only a fantasy. Don't you have myths?"

"Not like that. The dead go into the Night, and the Night becomes the Day, is the Day. Like Regan, who was caught in the Burning Wheel, and rose to heaven and was cast down again, and was wept over by the Mother—those are Aspects of God, they mean the rainy season that brings dry earth to life and they also mean dreams and the waking from dreams, and loss-remembrance-recreation, and the transformations of physical energy, and— Oh, don't you see, it's all one! It isn't two people separate, become nothing, desiring to be nothing, even. It mustn't be!"

Raven put away his flute. They walked on until Elfavy broke from him, danced a few steps, a slow and stately dance which suddenly became a leap. She ran back smiling and took his arm again.

"I'll forget it," she said. "Your home is very distant. This is Gwydion, and too near Bale time to be unhappy."

"What is this Bale time?"

"When we go to the Holy City," she said. "Once each year. Each Gwydiona year, that is, which I believe makes about five of Old Earth's. Everybody, all over the planet, goes to the Holy City maintained by his own town. It may be a dull wait for you people, unless you can join us.... Perhaps you can!" she cried, eagerness washing out the last terror.

"What happens?"

"God comes to us."

"Oh." He thought of dionysiac rites on certain backward planets and asked with great care: "Do you see

God, or feel Vwi?" The last word was a pronoun; Gwydiona employed an extra gender, the universal.

"Oh, no," said Elfavy. "We are God."

The dance ended in a final exultant jump, wings fluttering iridescent and the bird head turned skyward. The pipe and drum tape fell silent. The dancer's plumage swept the grass as she bowed. She vanished into a canebrake. The audience, seated crosslegged, closed eyes for an unspeaking minute, which Tolteca thought was a more graceful tribute than applause.

He looked around again as the ceremony broke up. It didn't seem quite real to him, yet, that camp should be pitched, supper eaten, and the time come for rest and sleep, while the sun had not reached noon. The long day, of course: Gwydion was just past vernal equinox; but even at its mild and rainy midwinter, daylight lasted a couple of sleeps.

The effect hadn't been so noticeable at Instar. The town employed an auroral generator to give soft outdoor illumination, and went about its business. Organized during that period, the survey expedition had marched into the hills at dawn. Already one day had passed on the trail, with two campings—and one night, where the moon needed little help from the travelers' flashbeams, and now another forenoon. Sometime tomorrow they ought to reach the upland site which Dawyd had suggested might make a spaceport.

Tolteca could feel the tiredness due rough kilometers in his muscles, but he wasn't sleepy yet. He stood up, glancing over the camp. Dawyd had selected a good spot, a meadow in the forest. The half-dozen Gwydiona who accompanied him chattered gaily as they banked the fire and spread out sleeping bags. One man, standing watch against possible carnivores, carried a longbow. Tolteca

had seen what that weapon could do, when a hunter had brought in an arcas for meat. Nonetheless, he wondered why everyone had courteously refused those firearms the *Quetzal* brought as gifts.

The ten Namerican scientists and engineers who had come along were in more of a hurry to bed down. Tolteca chuckled, recalling their dismay when he announced that this trip would be on shank's mare. But Dawyd was right, there was no better way to learn an area. Raven had also joined the group, with two of his men. The *Lochlanna* seemed incapable of weariness, and their damned slithering politeness never failed them, but they were always a little apart from the rest.

Tolteca sauntered past the cane-brake, along a side path. Though no one lived in these hills, the *Gwydiona* often went up here for recreation, and small solar-powered robots maintained the trails. He had not quite dared hope he would meet *Elfavy*. But when she came around a flowering tree, the heart leaped in him.

"Aren't you tired?" he asked, lame-tongued, after she stopped and gave greeting.

"Not much," she answered. "I wanted to stroll a while before sleep. Like you."

"Well, let's go into partnership."

She laughed. "An interesting concept. You have so many commercial enterprises on your planet, is this another one? Hiring out to take walks for people who would rather sit at home?"

Tolteca bowed. "If you'll join me, I'll make a career of that."

She flushed and said quickly: "Come this way. If I remember this neighborhood since the last time I was here, it has a beautiful view not far off."

She had changed her costume for a plain tunic. Sunlight came through leaves to touch her lithe dancer's body; the hair, loosened, fell in

waves down her back. Tolteca could not find the words he really wanted, nor could he share her easy silence.

"We don't do everything for money on Nuevamerica," he said, afraid of what she might think. "It's only, well, our particular way of organizing our economy."

"I know," she said. "To me it seems so...impersonal, lonely, each man fending for himself—but that may just be because I am not used to the idea."

"Our feeling is that the state should do as little as possible," he said, earnest with the ideals of his people. "Otherwise it will get too much power, and that's the end of freedom. But then private enterprise must take over; and it must be kept competitive, or it will in turn develop into a tyranny." Perforce he used several words which *Gwydiona* lacked, such as the last. He had introduced them to her before, during long discussions at Dawyd's house, when they had tried to understand each other's viewpoints.

"But why should the society, or the state as you call it, be opposed to the individual?" she asked. "I still don't grasp what the problem is, Miguel. We seem to do much as we please, all the time, here on *Gwydion*; and yet it all works out for mutual benefit, money is only an economic convenience and its possession does not give a man power over his fellows."

"You are all reasonable people," said Tolteca. "Nor have you any need to curb violence. You hardly know what anger is. And hate...another word which isn't in your language. Hate is to be always angry with someone else." He saw shock on her face, and hurried to add: "Then we must contend with the lazy, the greedy, the unscrupulous—Do you know, I begin to wonder if we should carry out this project. It may be best that your planet have nothing to do with any others. You are too good; you could

be too badly hurt."

She shook her head. "No don't think that. Obviously, we are different from you. Perhaps genetic drift has caused us to lose a trait or two otherwise common to mankind. But the difference isn't that great, and it doesn't make us superior. After all, you came to us. We never managed to build spaceships."

"Never chose to," he corrected her.

He remembered a remark of Raven's one time in Instar: "It isn't natural for humans to be gentle and rational all the time. They've done great things here; they don't lack energy. But where does the excess energy go?" At the time, Tolteca had bristled. Only a professional killer would be frightened by total sanity, he thought. Now he began, unwilling, to see that Raven had asked a legitimate scientific question.

"We never chose to do many things," said Elfavy with a hint of wistfulness.

"I admit wondering why you don't at least colonize the uninhabited parts of Gwydion."

"We stabilized the population by general agreement, several centuries ago. More people would only destroy nature."

They emerged from the woods again. Another meadow sloped upward to a cliff edge. The grass was strewn with white flowers; here and there a tree stood, slender, full of gold blossoms; the common bush of star-shaped leaves grew everywhere about, its buds swelling, the air heady from their odor. Beyond this spine of the hills lay a deep valley and then the mountains rose, clear and powerful against the sky.

Elfavy swept an arm in an arc. "Should we crowd out this?" she asked.

Tolteca thought of his own brawling unrestful folk, the forests they had already raped, and made no answer.

The girl stood a moment, frowning,

on the clifftop. A west wind blew strongly up here, straining the tunic against her and tossing sunlit locks of hair. Tolteca caught himself staring so rudely that he forced his eyes away, across kilometers toward that gray volcanic cone named Mount Grannis.

"No," said Elfavy, her tone stubborn, "I must not be smug. People did live here once. Just a few farmers and woodcutters, but they did maintain isolated homes. However, that is long past. Nowadays I don't believe we would occupy these regions even if it were safe. It would be wrong. All life has a right to existence, has it not? Men shouldn't wear more of a Night Face than they must."

Tolteca concentrated on the meaning with some difficulty, because the sound was so pleasant. Night Face—oh, yes, part of the Gwydiona religion. (If "religion" was the right word. "Philosophy" might be better. "Way of life" might be still more accurate.) Since they believed everything to be a facet of that eternal and infinite Oneness which they called God, it followed that God was also death, ruin, sorrow. Though they didn't say much, or seem to think much, about that side of reality. He remembered that their arts and literature, like their daily lives, were sunny, cheerful, completely logical once you had mastered the complex symbolisms. Even the pain and loss of one much beloved was mourned in a controlled manner which Raven admired but Tolteca had had trouble understanding.

"I don't believe your folk could harm nature," he said. "You work with it, make yourselves part of it."—

"That's the ideal," laughed Elfavy, "but I'm afraid practice has no more statistical correlation with preaching on Gwydion than anywhere else in the universe." She knelt and began to pluck the small white flowers. "I shall make a garland of jule for you," she said. "A sign of friendship, since

the jule blooms when the year is being reborn. Now that's a nice harmonious thing for me to do, isn't it? And yet if you asked the plant, it might not agree!"

"Thank you," he said, overwhelmed.

"The Bird Maiden had a chaplet of jule," she said. By now he realized that the retelling of symbolic myths was a standard conversational gambit here, like a Lochlanna's inquiry after the health of your father. "That is why I wore bird costume this time. It is her season, and today is the Day of the River Child. When the Bird Maiden met the River Child, he was lost and crying. She carried him home and gave him her crown." She glanced up. "It is a seasonal myth," she explained: "the end of the rainy season, lowland floods, then sunlight and the blooming jule. Plus all those moral lessons the elders are always quacking about, plus about a hundred other possible interpretations. The entire story is too complicated to tell on a warm day, even if the episode of the Riddling Tree is one of our best poems. But I always like to dance the story."

She fell silent, her hands busy in the grass. For lack of anything else, he pointed to one of the budding bushes. "What's this called?" he asked.

"With the five-pointed leaves? Oh, baleflower. It grows everywhere."

"So I've noticed. It must have quite a lot of mythology, then."

Elfavy stopped. She looked up at him. The violet eyes seemed, for an instant, almost blind. "No," she said.

"What? But I thought... I thought everything means something on Gwydion, as well as being something. Usually it has many different meanings—"

"This is only baleflower." Her voice grew thin. "Nothing else."

Tolteca pulled himself up short. Some taboo—no, surely not that, the Gwydiona were even freer from arbi-

trary prohibitions than his own people. He resolved to have the plant studied, botanically and chemically, when he got back to the ship. But don't tell anyone....

The girl finished her work, jumped to her feet and flung a wreath about his neck. "There!" she laughed. "No, hold still, it's caught on one ear—Ah, good."

He gestured to the one in her hand. "Aren't you going to put that on yourself?"

"Oh, no. A jule garland is always for someone else. This is for Raven."

"What?" Tolteca stiffened.

Again she flushed and looked past him toward the mountains. "I got to know him a little in Instar. I drove him around, showing him the sights. Or we walked."

Tolteca thought of all the times in that long moonlit night when she had not been at home. He said, "I don't believe Raven is your sort," and heard his voice go rough.

"I don't understand him," she whispered. "And yet in a way I do. Maybe. As I might understand a storm."

She started back toward camp. Tolteca said bitterly, "I should think you, of everyone alive, would be immune to such cheap glamor. Soldier! Hereditary aristocrat!"

"Those things I don't comprehend," she said, her eyes still averted. "To kill people, or make them do your bidding, as if they were machines— But it isn't that way with him. Not really."

They went down the trail in stillness, boots thudding next to sandals. At last she murmured, "He lives with the Night Faces. All the time. I can't even bear to think of that, and yet he endures it."

Enjoys it, Tolteca wanted to growl. But he realized he had been backbiting, and held his peace.

They returned to find most of the party asleep, eyelids padded against daylight. The sentry saluted them with a raised arrow. Elfavy con-

tinued to the edge of camp, where the three Lochlanna had spread their bedrolls. Kors snored, a gun in his hand; Wildenvey looked too young and helpless for his gory shipboard brags. Raven was still awake. He squatted on his haunches and frowned at a sheaf of photographs.

As Elfavy approached, his grin sprang forth, he seemed quite honestly pleased. "Well, this is a happy chance," he called. "Will you join me? I have a pot of tea on the grill over the fire."

"No, thank you. I like that tea stuff of yours, but it would keep me from sleeping." Elfavy stood before him, looking down at the ground. The wreath dangled in her hand. "I only—"

"Never come between an Oakenshaw and his tea," said Raven. "Ah, there, Sir Engineer."

Elfavy's face burned. "I only wanted to see you a moment," she faltered.

"And I you. Someone mentioned former habitation in this area, and I noticed traces on a ridge near here. I went up there with a camera." Raven flowed erect and fanned out his self-developing films. "It was a thorp once, several houses and outbuildings. Not much left now."

"No. Long abandoned." The girl lifted her wreath and lowered it again.

Raven gave her a steady look. "Destroyed," he told her.

"Oh? Oh, yes. I have heard this region was dangerous. The volcano—"

"No natural catastrophe," said Raven. "I know the signs. My men and I cleared away the brush with a flash pistol and dug in the ground. Those buildings had wooden roofs and rafters, which burned. We found two human skeletons, more or less complete. One had a skull split open, the other a corroded iron object between its ribs." He raised the pictures toward her eyes. "Do you see?"

"Oh." She stepped back. One hand crept to her mouth. "What—"

"Everyone tells me there is no record of men killing men on Gwydion," said Raven. "It's not merely rare, it's unknown. And yet that thorp was attacked and burned once."

Elfavy gulped. Anger rushed into Tolteca, thick and hot. "Look here, Raven," he snapped, "you may be free to bully some poor Lochlanna peasant, but—"

"No," said Elfavy. "Please."

"Did all the other homes up here suffer a like fate?" Raven flung the questions at her, not loudly but nonetheless like bullets. "Were the hills deserted because it was too hazardous to live in such isolation?"

"I don't know." Elfavy's voice lifted with a raggedness it had not borne until now. "I...have seen ruins, here and there...nobody knows what happened." A sudden yell: "*Everything* isn't recorded in history, you know! Do you know every answer to every question about your own planet?"

"Of course not," said Raven. "But if this were my world, I'd at least know why all the buildings are constructed like fortresses."

"Like what?"

"You know what I mean."

"Why...you asked me that once before...I told you," she stammered. "The strength of the house, the family—a symbol—"

"I heard the myth," said Raven. "I was also assured that no one has ever believed those myths to be literal truth, only poetic expressions. Your charming tale about Anren who made the stars has not prevented you from having an excellent grasp of astrophysics. So what are you guarding against? What are you afraid of?"

Elfavy crouched back. "Nothing." The words rattled from her. "If, if, if there were anything...wouldn't we have better weapons against it...than bows and arrows? People get hurt—in accidents, by sickness and old age—they die, the Night has them—But

nothing else! There can't be!"

She whirled about and fled.

Tolteca stepped toward Raven, who stood squinting after the girl. "Turn around," he said. "I'm going to beat the guts out of you."

Raven laughed, a metallic noise. "How much combat karate do you know, trader's clerk?"

Tolteca dropped a hand to his gun. "We're in another culture," he said between his teeth. "A generation of scientific study won't be enough to map all its thought processes. If you think you can go trampling freely on these people's feelings, no more aware of what you're doing than a bulldozer with a broken autopilot—"

They both felt the ground shiver. An instant afterward the sound reached them, booming down the sky.

The three Lochlanna were on their feet in a ring, weapons aimed outward, without seeming to have moved. Elsewhere the camp stumbled awake, men calling to each other through thunders.

Tolteca ran after Elfavy. The sun seemed remote and heatless, the explosions rattled his teeth together, he felt the ground vibrations in his bones.

The noise died away, but echoes flew about for seconds longer. Dawyd joined Elfavy and threw his arms around her. A flock of birds soared up, screaming.

The physician's gaze turned westward. Black smoke boiled above the treetops. As Tolteca reached the Simmons, he saw Dawyd trace the sign against misfortune.

"What is it?" cried the Namerican. "What happened?"

Dawyd looked his way. For a moment the old eyes were without recognition. Then he answered curtly, "Mount Granis."

"Oh." Tolteca slapped his forehead. The relief was such that he wanted to howl his laughter. Of course! A volcano cleared its throat, after a century or two of quiet. Why in the

galaxy were the Gwydiona breaking camp?

"I never expected this," said Dawyd. "Though I daresay our seismology is less developed than yours."

"Our man made some checks, and didn't think we would have any serious trouble if we built a spaceport here," said Tolteca. "That wasn't a real eruption, you know. Just a bit of lava and a great deal of smoke."

"And a west wind," said Dawyd. "Straight from Granis to us."

He paused before adding, almost absent-mindedly: "The site I had in mind for your spaceport is protected from trouble of this kind. I checked the airflow patterns with the central meteorological computer at Bettwis. It is a mere unlucky happenstance that we should be at this exact spot, this very moment. Now we must run, and may fear give speed to us."

"From a little smoke?" asked Tolteca incredulously.

Dawyd held his daughter close. "This is a planet of middle Population One," he said. "Rich in heavy metals. That smoke and dust, when it gets here, will include enough such material to kill us."

By the time they got in motion, jogging southward along a sparsely wooded ridge, the cloud had overshadowed them. Kors looked up past a dim red ball of sun, estimating with an artilleryman's eye. His lantern jaw worked a moment, as if chewing sour cud, before he spoke:

"We can't go back the way we came, Commandant. That muck'll fall out all over those parts. We've got to keep headed this way and hope we can get out from under. Ask one of these yokels if he knows a decent southbound trail."

"Must we have a trail?" puffed Wildenvey. "Let's cut right through the woods."

"Listen to the for-Harry's-sake heathdweller talk!" jeered Kors. "Porkface, I grew up in the Ernshaw. Have you ever tried to run

through underbrush?"

"Save your breath, you two," advised Raven. He loped a little faster until he joined Dawyd and Elfavy at the head of the line. Grass whispered under his boots, now and then a hobnail rang on a stone and sparks showered. The sky was dull brown, streaked with black, the light from it like tarnished brass and casting no shadows. The only bright things in the world were an occasional fire-spit from Mount Granis, and Elfavy's flying hair.

Raven put the question to her. He spaced his words with his breathing, which he kept in rhythm with his feet. The girl replied in the same experienced manner. "In this direction, all paths converge on the Holy City. We ought to be safe there, if we can reach it soon enough."

"Before Bale time?" exclaimed Dawyd.

"Is it forbidden?" asked Raven, and wondered if he would use his guns to enter a refuge tabooed.

"No...no rule of conduct... But nobody goes there outside Bale time!" Dawyd shook his head, bewildered. "It would be a meaningless act."

"Meaningless—to save our lives?" snapped Raven.

"Unsymbolic," said Elfavy. "It would fit into no pattern." She lifted her face to the spreading darkness and cried. "But what sense would it make to breathe that dust? I want to see Byord again!"

"Yes. So. So be it." Dwayd shut his mouth and concentrated on making speed.

Raven's eyes, watching the uneven ground, touched the girl's quick feet and stayed there. Not until he tripped on a vine did he remember exactly where he was. Then he swore and forced himself to think of the situation. Without analytical apparatus, he had no way to confirm that volcanic ash was as dangerous as Dawyd claimed; but it sounded reasonable, on a planet like this. The first expedition

had been warned about many vegetable species which were poisonous to man simply because they grew in soil loaded with heavy elements. It wouldn't take a lot of inhaled metallic material to destroy you: radioactives, arsenates, perhaps elemental mercury liberated from its oxide by heat. A few gulps and you were done. Dying might take a while, prolonged by the medics' attempts to get a hopelessly big dose out of your body. Not that Raven intended to watch his own lungs and brain go rotten. His pistol could do him a final service. But Elfavy—

They stopped to rest at the head of a downward trail. One of the Gwydiona protested through a dried-out throat: "Not the Holy City! We'd destroy the whole meaning of Bale time!"

"No, we wouldn't." Dawyd, who had been thinking as he trotted, answered with an authority that pulled all their reddened eyes to him. "The eruption at the moment when we happened to be downwind was an accident so improbable it was senseless. Right? That Night Face called Chaos." Several men crossed themselves, but they all nodded. "If we redress the situation—restore the balance of events, of logical sequence—by entering the Focus of God (in our purely human persona, at that, which makes our act a parable of man's conscious reasoning powers, his science)—what could be more significant?"

They mulled it over while the gloom thickened and Mount Granis boomed at their backs. One by one, they murmured agreement. Tolteca whispered to Raven, in Ispanyo: "Oa, I do believe I see a new myth being born."

"Yes. They'll doubtless bring one of their quasi-gods into it, a few generations hence...while preserving an accurate historical account of what really happened!"

"But by all creation! Here they are, running from an unnecessarily horri-

ble death, and they argue whether it would be artistic to shelter in this temple spot!"

"It makes more sense than you think," said Raven somberly. "I remember once when I was a boy, my very first campaign in fact. A civil war, the Bitter Water clan against my own Ethnos. We boxed a regiment of them in the Stawr Hills, expecting them to dig in. They wouldn't, because there were brave men's graves all around, the Danoora who fell three hundred years ago. They came out prepared to be mowed down. When we grasped the situation, we let them go, gave them a day's head start. They reached their main body, which perhaps turned the course of the war. But that victory would have cost us too much."

Tolteca shook his head. "I don't understand you."

"You wouldn't."

"Any more than you would understand why men died to pull down the foreign castles on your planet."

"Well, maybe so."

Raven wondered how much lethal dust he was already breathing. Not enough to matter, yet. The air was still clean in his nostrils, he could still see far across hills and down forested slopes. The heavy particles and stones were not dangerous. It was the finely divided material, slowly settling over many hectares, which could kill men.

Like a mind-reader, Dawyd said: "The Holy City will be almost ideal for us. Airflow patterns protect it from the ash—it lies right under the Steeps of Kolumkill, and never gets a south wind. The site was chosen with that in mind, even though our local volcanoes very rarely erupt. We shall have to wait there till the next heavy rain, which may take a few days at this season. That will carry down the last airborne dust leach from the soil what has fallen, wash the poison into the rivers and so into the sea, safely diluted. The City has ample food sup-

plies, and I see no reason why we should not avail ourselves of them."

He stood up. "But first we must get there," he finished. "Does everyone have his breath back?"

The rest of the journey was little remembered. They went at a dogtrot, along well-kept trails, under cool leaves; they halted a few minutes at a time when it seemed indicated; but toward the end men lurched along in each other's arms. Three Namericans collapsed. Dawyd had poles chopped and raincoats spread to make litters for them. No one complained at the burden. But maybe that was because no breath was left to complain.

When he entered the Holy City, Raven himself scarcely saw it. He retained enough strength to spread a bedroll for Elfavy, who sprawled quietly down and passed out. He brought a cup of water for Dawyd, who lay on his back and stared with eyes emptied of awareness. He even washed the grime and sweat from himself before crawling into his own bag. But then darkness clubbed him.

When he awoke, it took a few seconds before he knew his own name, and a bit longer to fix his location. He rallied those drilled reflexes by which he could deny to himself that he was stiff and aching. Shadow from a wall covered him, but he looked straight up to the stars. Had he slept so long? The sky was utterly clear; men were indeed safe in this place. The constellations glittered in unfamiliar patterns. He could barely recognize that one they called The Plowman on Lochlann: its distortion made him feel cold and alone. The Nebula, dimming some parts of the sky and blotting out others, was somehow less alien.

He left his bag, crouched in the dark and opened the packsack pillow with fingers too schooled to need light. Quickly he dressed. Dagger and pistol made a comforting drag on his flanks. He threw a wide-sleeved tunic over the drab route clothes, for it

flaunted the crests of his family and nation, and glided between men still unconscious into the open.

The night was very quiet. He stood in a forum, if it could be so named. There was no paving in the Holy City, but thick pseudomoss lay cool and full of dew under his feet. On every side rose white marble buildings, long and low, fluted delicate porticos upholding roofs where figures danced on friezes. They had wide, doorless main entrances atop mossy ramps, but the windows were mere slits. Colonnades and wings knitted them together into a labyrinthine unity. Behind them stood a ring of towers, airily slender, with bronze cupolas that must show a mellow green by daylight. The entire place was surrounded by an amphitheater or whatever you wanted to call it: low moss-carpeted tiers enclosing this miniature dell like the sides of a chalice. Trees grew thickly on its top.

Down here there were no trees; but many formal gardens—rather, a single, reticulated one, interwoven with the houses and the towers—held beds of Terran violets and thornless roses, native jule and sunbloom and bale-flower and much else which Raven didn't recognize. Southward, those cliffs called the Steeps of Kolumkill, which the party had had to go around, shouldered against the stars.

He was able to see much detail, for the moon She was rising in the west. Its retrograde path would take it over the sky and through half a cycle of phases during half a night period. Already it was a white semicircle, a degree in angular diameter, filling the hollow with unreal light.

A fountain tinkled in the middle of the forum. Raven crossed to its little moss-grown bowl and swallowed until his mummy gullet felt alive again. The water gurgled back down a whimsical drainpipe, a grotesque fish face. Well, why shouldn't there be humor in the geometric center of

sacredness? thought Raven. The people of Gwydion laughed more than most, not raucously like a Namerican or wolfishly like a Lochlanna, but a gentle mirth which found something comical in even the grandest things... The water must come from some woodland spring, it had a wild taste.

He heard a noise and whirled about, one hand on his gun. Elfavy entered the moonlight. "Oh," he said stupidly. "Are you awake, milady?"

She laughed. "No. I am sound asleep in my bed in Instar." Treading close: "I woke up an hour ago or more, but didn't want to move. Not for a day, at least! Then I saw you here, and—" Her voice trailed off.

Raven directed his heartbeat to slow down. It obeyed poorly. "Someone should keep watch," he said. "May as well be me."

"No need, far-friend. There are no dangers here."

"Wild animals?"

"Robots keep them off. Other robots maintain the grounds." She pointed to a little wheeled machine weeding a rosebed with delicate tendrils.

Raven grinned. "Ah, but who maintains the robots?"

"Silly! An automatic unit, of course. Every ten years, local years, I mean, our engineers hold a midwinter ceremony where they inspect the facilities and bring in fresh supplies."

"I see. And otherwise no one ever comes here except at—uh—Bale time?"

She nodded. "No reason to. Shall we look around? Walking might get the cramp out of my legs." She could have been offering to show him any local curiosum.

Their feet fell noiseless on the moss. The buildings looked like faerie work, there under the brutal mass of Kolumkill; but as he reached a doorway, Raven saw that their walls were fused stone, thick and strong as all Gwydiona architecture. Light came

from fluoros, recessed in the high ceiling: probably solar-battery powered, he thought. It was dim, but there was little to see anyhow—a gracious anteroom, archways opening on corridors.

"We mustn't go very deeply in," said the girl, "or we will get lost and blunder around for hours till we find our way out. Look." She pointed down a hall, toward an intersection whence five other passages radiated. "That is only the edge of the maze."

Raven touched a wall. It yielded to his fingers, the same rubbery gray substance that felt so pleasant under his feet. "What's this?" he asked. "A synthetic elastomer? Does it line the whole interior?"

"Yes," said Elfavy. Her tone grew indifferent. "Nothing in here, really. Let's go up in one of the towers, then you can see the total pattern."

"A moment, if you grant." Raven opened one of the doors which lined the nearest corridor. It was of typical steel construction, though coated with the universal soft plastic, and had an inside bolt. The room beyond was ventilated through a slit-window; a toilet and water tap were the only furnishings, but a heap of small shapeless bags filled one corner. "What's in those?" asked Raven.

"Food supplies, sealed in plastic-skins," Elfavy answered. "An artificial food, which keeps indefinitely till opened. I'm afraid you won't find it very exciting, but it is nourishing."

"You seem to live rather austerity at Bale time," said Raven. He watched her from the edge of an eye.

"It is no time to worry about material needs. Instead, you grab a sack of food and slit it open with your thumbnail when hungry, drink from a tap or fountain when thirsty, flop down anywhere when sleepy."

"I see. But what is the important thing you do, to which keeping alive is so incidental?"

"I told you." She left the room with a quick nervous stride. "We are God."

"But when I asked you what you meant by that, you said you couldn't explain."

"I can't." She evaded his glance. Her voice was not perfectly level. "Don't you see, it goes beyond language. Any language. We employ several on Gwydion, you realize. Science is one, painting is another, music, another, choreography another and so on. According to what you have told me, this seems to be the only planet where myth was also developed, deliberately and systematically, as still a different language—not by primitives who confused it with the scientific or the common-sense concepts, but by people trained in semantics, who knew that each language describes one single facet of reality, and wanted myth to help them talk about something for which all the others were inadequate. You can't believe, for instance, that mathematics and poetry are interchangeable!"

"No," said Raven.

She brushed back her tousled hair and went on, eager now: "Well, what happens at Bale time could only be described by a fusion of every language, including those no human being has yet imagined. And such a super-language is impossible, because it would be self-contradictory."

"Do you mean that at Bale time you perceive, or commune with, total reality?"

They came out into the open again. She hastened across the forum, through the barred shadows of a colonnade to the spires beyond. He had never seen anything so beautiful as the sight of her running in the moonlight. She pulled up short at a tower doorway, it cast a darkness over her and she said from the darkness: "That's merely another set of words, *liatha*. Not even a label. I wish you could be here yourself and know!"

They started upward. A padded ramp wound around small rooms. It was dimly lit and stuffy. Raven asked, after a silence: "What was it you

called me just now?"

"What?" He couldn't be sure, but he thought her face was stained with quick color.

"Liatha I don't know that word."

Her lashes fluttered down. "Nothing," she mumbled. "An expression."

"Ah, let me guess." He wanted to make a joke, to suggest that it meant *oaf, barbarian, villain, swinedog* but remembered that Gwydiona had no such terms. Since she looked at him with enormous expectant eyes he must blunder, "Darling, beloved—"

She stopped, shrinking back against the wall. "You said you didn't know!"

The discipline of a lifetime kept him walking. When she rejoined him he made himself say, lightly, through a clamor: "You are most kind, peacemaker, but I don't need any further flattery than the fact that you have time to spare for me."

"There will be time enough for everything else," she whispered, "after you are gone."

The highest room, just under the roof, was the only one which possessed a true window, rather than a slit. Moonlight cataracted past its bronze grille. The air was warm, but that light made Elfavy's hair seem to crackle with frost. She pointed out at the intricate interlocking of labyrinth, towers, and flowerbeds. "The hexagons inscribed in circles mean the laws of nature," she began in a small voice, "their regularity enclosed in some greater scheme. It is the sign of Owan the Sunsmith, who—" She stopped. Neither of them had been listening. They searched each other's faces under the fenced-off moon.

"Must you go?" she asked finally.

"I have made promises," he said.

"But after they are fulfilled?"

"I don't know." He considered the stranger sky. "I've known people from one place, one culture, who tried to settle into another. It rarely works."

"It might. If there were willingness. A Gwydiona...for example..."

could be happy even on, well, on Lochlann."

"I wonder."

"Will you do something for me? Now."

His pulses jumped. "If I can, milady."

"Sing me the rest of that song. The one you sang when we first met."

"But you couldn't—"

"I would like to try again. Please."

He hadn't brought his flute, but he sang low in the chilly night:

*"— 'Tis I, my love, sits on your grave
And will not let you sleep;
For I crave one kiss of your clay-cold lips,
And that is all I seek.'*

*"You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips;
But my breath smells earthy strong;
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips
Your time will not be long"—*

"No," said Elfavy. She gulped and hugged herself, seeking warmth. "I'm sorry."

He recalled again that there was no tragic art on Gwydion. None whatsoever. He wondered why. He wondered what a *Lear* or an *Agamemnon* or an *Old Men At Centauri* might do to her. Or the real thing, even: Vard of Hell-dale rebelling for a family honor he didn't really believe in, defeated and slain by his own comrades; young Brand who broke his regimental oath, gave up friends and wealth and the mistress he loved more than the sun, to go live in a peasant's hut and tend his insane wife.

He wondered if he, himself, was healthy enough within the skull to live on Gwydion.

The girl rubbed her eyes. "Best we go down again," she said. "Others will soon be awake. They don't know what has become of us."

"We'll talk later," said Raven.
 "When we aren't so tired."
 "Of course," she said.

Festival dwelt in Instar. Tolteca was reminded of Carnival Week on Nuevamerica—not the commercialized feverishness of the cities, but masquerade and street dancing in the hinterlands, where folk still made their own pleasure. Oddly enough, for a people otherwise so ceremonious, the Gwyndiona celebrated the time just before Bale by scrapping all formalism. Courtesy, honesty, nonviolence seemed too ingrained to lose. But men shouted and made horseplay, women dressed with a lavishness that would have been snickered at anytime else in the planet's long year, schools became playgrounds, each formerly simple meal was a banquet, and quite a few families broke out the wine and got humanly drunk. A garland of roses, jule, and pungent margwy herb hung on every door; no hour of day or night lacked music.

And so it was all over this world, thought Tolteca: in every town on every inhabited island, the year had turned green and the people were soon bound for their shrines.

He came striding down a gravel road. The sun stood at late morning and the boy Byord walked with a hand in his. Far and holy above western forests, the mountain peaks dreamed.

"What did you do then?" asked Byord, breathless.

"We stayed in the City till it rained," said Tolteca. "A couple of days, which we passed with games and stories. Then when it was safe, we proceeded to our goal, inspected it—a fine site indeed—and at last we came back here. We got in the day before yesterday, remember?"

"Gol! What's the City like?"

"Don't you know?"

"Course not 'cept they told us a little about it at school. I wasn't born, last Bale time. I'm going with my

mother because I'm big enough."

"It's very beautiful," said Tolteca. He wondered how children this age fitted into a time of religious meditation if that was what it was, and how they kept so well afterward the secret of what happened.

"Tell me 'bout planets", said Byord. "When I get big, I want to be a spaceman. Like you."

"Why not?" said Tolteca. Byord could get as good a scientific education here as anywhere in the known galaxy. By the time he was old enough, the astro academies would doubtless be eager to enroll Gwydiona cadets. Gwydion itself would be more than a refueling stop, a decade hence. A people that gifted couldn't help themselves, they were certain to become curious about the universe (as if they weren't already so interested that only the intelligence of their questions made the number endurable) —and, yes, to influence it. The Empire had fallen, human society was once more in flux. What better ideal for the next civilization than Gwydion?

And why count myself out? thought Tolteca. *When we build our spaceports here, they'll require Namerican administrators, engineers, factors, liaison officers. Why shouldn't I become one, and live my life under Ynis and She?*

He looked down at the tangled head near his waist. He'd always shuddered at the notion of acquiring a ready-made family. But why not? Byord was a polite and talented boy who still remained very much a boy. It would be a pleasure to take him fishing. Even today's outing—undertaken frankly to ingratiate one Miguel Tolteca with Elfavy and Simnon—had been a lot of fun.

When earlier, one of the Namerican spacemen had expressed a desire to settle here, Raven had warned him he'd go berserk in one standard year. But what did Raven know about it? The prediction was doubtless true

enough for him. Lochlanna society, caste-ridden, haughty, ritualistic and murderous has indeed nothing in common with Gwydion. *But Nueveramerica now—oh, I don't pretend I would miss the lights and tall buildings, once in a while, but what's to prevent me and my family from taking vacation trips there? As for the rest, here are a calm, rational, but merry people with an ideal of beauty, uncrowded in a nature which has never been trampled on. And not static, either. They have their scientific research, innovations in the arts, engineering projects. Look how they welcome the idea of regular interstellar contact. How could I fail to fall in love with Gwydion.*

Specifically, with—Tolteca shut that thought off. He came from a civilization where all problems were practical problems. So let's not moon about, but rather take the indicated steps to get what we want. Since Byord was pestering him for yarns of other planets, he reminisced aloud, with some editing, and the rest of their walk passed quickly.

They entered the town. It looked deserted all at once. Where people had milled about a few hours ago, they now seemed to be indoors. Here and there a man hurried from one place to another, carrying some burden. It was quiet beneath the sun, but with an underlying murmur, voices behind walls.

Byord broke free and skipped in the street. "We're going soon, we're going soon," he caroled.

"How do you know?" asked Tolteca. He had been told long ago that there was no set date for Bale time.

Every freckle grinned. "I know, Adult Miguel! Aren't you comin' too?"

"I think I better stay and take care of your pets," said Tolteca. Byord maintained the usual small-boy zoo of bugs and amphibia.

"There's Granther! Hey, Granther!" Byord broke into a run. Dawyd,

emerging from his house braced himself. When the small cyclone had struck him and been duly hugged, he pushed it toward the entrance.

"Go on inside, now," he said. "Your mother's making ready. She has to wash at least a few kilos of dirt off you and pack your lunch, before we start."

"Thanks, Adult Miguel!" Byord whoozed through the door.

Dawyd chuckled. "I hope you aren't too exhausted," he said.

"Not at all," Tolteca answered. "I enjoyed it. We went upstream to the House of the Philosophers. I never thought a place devoted to abstract thinking would include picnic grounds and a carousel."

"Why not? Philosophers are human too, I'm told. It is refreshing for them to watch the children, romp with them...and perhaps a little respect for knowledge rubs off on the youngsters." Dawyd started down the street. "Would you like to accompany me? You being a technical man, this may interest you."

"Are you leaving now?" Tolteca fell into step.

"Yes. The signs have become clear, even to me. Older people are not so sensitive; the young adults have been wild all morning." Dawyd's eyes glittered, and his lined brown face held less than its normal serenity.

"It is about ten hours on foot to the Holy City," he added after a moment. "Less for a man unencumbered by children and aged. If you should, yourself, feel the time upon you, please do come after us."

Tolteca drew a long breath, as if to smell the tokens. The air was alive with the blooming of a hundred flowers, trees, bushes, vines; nectar-gathering insects droned in flooding sunlight. "You never told me what the signs are," he reminded.

At other times, Dawyd had been a little uneasy at such queries, and changed the subject—which was simple enough with so much to talk:

about, twelve hundred years of separate history. Now the physician laughed aloud. "I can't tell you," he said. "I know, that is all. How do buds know when to unfold?"

"But haven't you ever, in the rest of the year, made any scientific study of—"

"Here we are." Dawyd halted on the riverbank. The central fortress loomed square and bleak above them. Dawyd led the way inside, where long halls were cool and shadowy. Another man passed, holding a monkey wrench. Dawyd waved at him. "A technician," he explained. "Making a final check on the central power controls. Everything vital, or potentially dangerous, is stored here during Bale time: all motor vehicles in a garage down that way for instance. My own task—"

He opened a door which gave on a huge and sunny room, gaily painted walls lined with cribs and playpens. A mobile robot stood by each, and a bright large machine murmured to itself in the center of the floor. Dawyd walked around, looking. "This is a routine and rather nominal inspection," he said. "The engineers have already overhauled everything. I have to certify the sanitation and pleasantness of the environment, but that has never been a problem."

"What is it for?" asked Tolteca.

"Do you not know? Why, to care for infants, those too young to accompany us to the Holy City. Byord is about as young as we ever dare take them. The hospital wing of this building has robots to nurse the sick and the very old during Bale time, but that is not under my supervision." Dawyd rubbed his chin. "What in the name of Chaos was I going to tell you?... Oh, yes. In case you have not already been warned. The entire building is locked up during Bale. Automatic shock beams are fired at anyone—anything—that comes within ten meters. Any moving object which actually touches the outside wall is

shot by the robots, flame blasts. Stay away from here!"

Tolteca stood quiet, for the last words had been alarmingly harsh.

Finally he ventured: "Isn't that rather extreme?"

"Bale time lasts about three of our days," said Dawyd, staring at a pen, the words tossed over his shoulder. "That's more than ten standard days. Plus the time to walk to the Holy City and back. We don't take chances."

"But—you've only carnivorous animals to fear, haven't you? A closed door, a barred window—"

Dawyd said, not entirely steadily: "We don't talk about it much. But Bale is, after all, when God comes, and God has Vwi Faces too. It isn't a safe time. Not everyone returns from the Holy City. Those who do, sometimes find that in spite of locks and shutters, there has been destruction. So we put our machines and our helpless people where nothing can enter till the time locks open themselves."

"Have you any idea," breathed Tolteca, "what causes...caused...the trouble?"

"No," said Dawyd. "We spend the entire time in the Holy City. It has been theorized, possibly the mountain ape is driven mad by the nearness of God, and comes down into the lowlands. Or conceivably, I don't know, conceivably we are not the only intelligent race on Gwydion. There are legends about underground creatures... But it is never a good idea to theorize in advance of the facts."

He continued his inspection with jerky movements, and in silence.

They were leaving the fortress when Tolteca suggested diffidently, "Perhaps we can observe what happens while you are gone."

Dawyd had cooled down again. "I doubt it," he said. "Many attempts were made in the past to plant cameras and other recording devices, but those were always evaded, or sometimes broken. I don't believe anything

untoward will happen. Nothing has, for many years. Even in my own boyhood, a raid on a deserted town was a rare event. You must not believe this is a major problem for us.

Tolteca struck a cigaret. The streets were now entirely bare, save for himself and the older man. And yet the sun drenched them in light. It sharpened their desolation.

"I'm afraid you will have a dull time, actually." Dawyd was becoming more and more himself. "Everybody gone, everything locked up, all over the inhabited planet. Maybe you would like to fly down to the southern hemisphere, where no one lives, and explore a little."

"I think we'll just stay put and correlate our data," said Tolteca. "We have a lot. When you return—"

"We won't be worth much for a few days," said Dawyd. "It isn't easy for mortal flesh, being God."

They reached his house. He stopped at the door, embarrassed. "I should invite you in, but—"

"I understand. Family rites." Tolteca smiled. "I'll just stroll down to the park at town's end. You'll all pass by there on your way and I'll wave farewell."

"Thank you, far-friend."

The door closed. Tolteca stood a moment, inhaling deeply, before he ground the cigaret butt under his heel and walked off between shuttered walls.

The park was gay with flowers. A few of the expedition lounged under shade trees, also waiting to observe the departure. Tolteca saw Raven, and clamped lips together. *I will not lose my temper.* He approached and gave greeting.

Raven answered with Lochlanna formality. The mercenary was in full dress for the occasion, blouse, trousers, tooled leather boots, embroidered surcoat. He stood massive next to a baleflower bush as tall as himself. Its buds were opening in a riot of crimson blooms, they smelled like sum-

mer meadows and like something else almost but not quite remembered. The Siamese cat Zio nestled in Raven's arms, he stroked the beast with one hand and got a purr for answer.

Tolteca repeated Dawyd's warning about the fortress. Raven's dark head nodded. "I knew that. I'd do the same in their place."

"Yes, you would," said Tolteca. He remembered his resolution and added impersonally, "Such over-destructiveness doesn't seem characteristic of the Gwydiona, though."

"This isn't a characteristic season. Every five standard years, for about ten standard days, something happens to them, and I'd feel easier if I knew what."

"My guess—" Tolteca paused. He hated to say it aloud. But finally: "A dionysiac religion."

"I can't swallow that," said Raven. "These people know all about photosynthesis. They don't believe magic makes the earth fertile."

"They might employ such ceremonies anyhow." Tolteca winced, thinking of Elfavy, but if he didn't say it himself, someone else would; and he was mature enough, he insisted, to accept a person on her own cultural terms. "Orgiastic."

"No," said Raven. "They aren't an orgiastic folk. Not at any time of year. That cool, reasonable, humorous mentality couldn't take a free-for-all seriously enough. Someone would be bound to start laughing and spoil the whole effect."

Tolteca was happy to agree and to suggest: "Well, then, drugs? Hallucinogens? A lot of cultures, you know, some of them quite scientific, believe that peyote or lysergic acid or whatever reveals otherwise inaccessible truths."

"If that were so in this case," Raven answered, "they'd use the stuff often than once in five years. Nor would they make such a mystery of their religion; they'd tell us in plain polite words, we aren't initiates and it's

none of our business what happens. Another trouble with your idea is, that they shun drugs so completely in their everyday life. Do you know, this past day is the first instance I've seen or heard or read of any Gwydiona even getting high on alcohol?"

"Well," flared Tolteca, "suppose you tell me what they do!"

"I wish I could." Raven's troubled gaze went to the baleflower. "You said something about having this analyzed. Did you?"

"Yes. Orilla checked it out for me. Nothing special about it."

"Nothing at all?"

"Oa, its perfume does contain an indole, among other compounds, probably to attract pollinating insects. But quite harmless. If you breathed it at an extremely high concentration, you might get a little dizzy, I suppose, but you couldn't get a real jag."

Raven scowled. "And yet this bush is named for the festival. And alone on the whole planet, has no mythology."

Xinguez and I threshed that out. He checked his linguistic references, bearing in mind that Gwydiona stems from a rather archaic dialect of Anglic, closely related to the original English. That word *bale* can mean several things, depending on ultimate derivation. It can be a bundle; a fire, especially a funeral pyre; an evil or sorrow; and, more remotely and with a different original spelling, *Baal* is an ancient word for a god."

Tolteca tapped a fresh cigaret on his thumbnail and struck it with a rough motion. "You can imagine how the Gwydiona would intertwine such multiple meanings," he continued. "What elaborate symbolisms they'd develop. Those flowers have long petals aimed upward; a bush in full bloom would look rather like a fire, I imagine. The Burning Bush of primitive religion. Hence, maybe, the name *bale*. But that could also mean 'God' and 'evil'. And it blooms just at Bale

time. So because of all these coincidences, the baleflower symbolizes the Night Faces, the destructive aspect of reality...probably the most violent phase thereof, at that. Therefore, no one talks about it. The Gwydiona don't deny that evil and sorrow exist, but neither do they go out of their way to contemplate the fact."

"I know," said Raven. "In that respect, they're like Namericans."

"And in every other respect!" snapped Tolteca. "Including the fact that your bloody warlords are not going to carve up this planet!"

Raven turned his face to the engineer. So did Zio. It was disconcerting, for the cat's eyes were as cold and steady as the man's. "Are you quite certain," said Raven, "that these people are the same species as us?"

"Oa! If you think that just because they're too civilized to brew up war like you—" Tolteca advanced with fists cocked. *If Elfavy could only see!* it begged through the boiling within him. *If she could see what this animal really thinks of her!*

"Oh, quite possibly interbreeding is still feasible," said Raven. "We'll find that out soon enough."

Tolteca's fist leaped forward of itself.

Raven threw up an arm—Zio scampered to his shoulder—and blocked the blow. His hand slid down to seize Tolteca's own arm, his other hand got the Namerican's biceps, his foot scythed behind the oncoming ankles. Tolteca went on his back, pinned. The cat squalled and clawed at him.

"That isn't necessary, Zio." Raven let go. Several other men hurried up. He waved them away. "It was nothing," he called. "I was only demonstrating."

Kors looked dubious, but at that moment someone yelled, "They're coming!" and attention went to the road.

Not that the parade was much to see. The Instar folk walked with an

easy, distance-devouring stride. They were lightly clad; they carried the one lunch they would need on the way, spare garments, and nothing else. But their laughter and singing and rapid chatter were like a bird-flock, like sunlight on a windy lake, and now and then one of them danced among hurtling children. So they went past, a flurry of bright tunics, sunbrowned limbs, garlanded fair hair, up into the hills and the Holy City.

But Elfavy broke from them. She ran to Raven, caught both the soldier's hands in her own and cried, "Come with us! Can't you feel it, *liatha?*"

He watched her a long while, his features wooden, before he shook his head. "No."

Tears blurred her eyes, and that wasn't the way of Gwydion either. "You can never be God, then?" Her head drooped, the yellow mane hid her face. Tolteca stood staring. What else could he do?

"If I might give you the power," said Elfavy, "I would give up my own." She sprang free, raised hands to the sun and shouted: "But it's impossible that you can't feel it! God is here already, everywhere, I see Vwi shining from you, Raven! You must come!"

He folded his hands together within the surcoat sleeves. "Will you stay here with me?" he asked.

"Always, always."

"Now, I mean. During Bale time."

"What? Oh—no, yes—you are joking?"

He said slowly: "I'm told the Night Faces are also revealed, sometimes, under the Steeps of Kolumkill. That not everyone comes home every year."

Elfavy took a backward step from him. "God is more than good," she pleaded. "God is *real!*"

"Yes. As real as death."

"Great ylem!" exploded Tolteca. "What do you expect, man? Every-

body who can walk goes up there. Some must have incipient disease, or weak hearts, or old arteries. The excitement—"

Raven ignored him. "Is it a secret what happens, Elfavy?"

Her muscles untensed. Her laughter leaped forth. "No. It's only that words are such poor lame things."

"Well, tell me whatever words can, then. What do you do up there? What would a camera record?"

The blood drained from her face. She stood moveless. Eventually, out of a silence that grew and grew around her: "No. I can't."

"Or you mustn't?" Raven grabbed her bare shoulders so hard that his fingers sank in. She didn't seem to feel it, "You mustn't talk about it, or you won't, or you can't?" he roared. "Quick, now!"

Tolteca tried to stir, but his bones seemed locked together. The Instar people danced by, too lost in their joy to pay attention. The other Namericans looked indignant, but Wildenvey had drawn his gun, casually, and grinned in their faces. Elfavy shuddered. "I can't tell!" she gasped.

Raven's expression congealed. "You don't know," he said. "Is that it?"

"Let me go!"

He released her. She stumbled back against the bush. A moment she crouched, then drew a long breath. Tears caught sunlight on her cheeks, but she looked at the bruises on her skin, laughed, sprang forward and kissed Raven on his unmoving lips. "Wait for me, then, *liatha!*" She whirled, ran, and was lost in the throng.

Raven gazed after them till they dwindled among the fields.

Tolteca said through a taste like vomit: "Well, are you satisfied?"

"In a way." Raven didn't stir. His words fell flat.

"Don't make too many assumptions," said Tolteca. "She's in an ab-

normal state. Wait till she comes back and is herself again, before you get your hopes up."

"What?" Raven turned his head, blinking wearily, and seemed to recognize Tolteca only after a few seconds. "Oh. But you're wrong. That's not an abnormal state."

"Huh?"

"Your planet has seasons. Do you consider spring fever a disease? Is it unnatural to feel brisk on a clear fall day?"

"Wait a minute. What are you hinting at?"

"Never mind." Raven lifted his shoulders and let them fall, an old man's gesture. "Come, Sir Engineer, we may as well go back to the ship."

"But— Oa!" Tolteca's finger stabbed at the Lochlanna. "Do you mean you've guessed—"

"Yes. I may be wrong. Come, I say." Raven picked up Zio and became very busy making the cat comfortable in his sleeve.

"What?"

Raven started to go.

Tolteca caught him by the arm. Raven spun about. Briefly, the Lochlanna's face was drawn into such a snarl that the Namerican fell back. Raven clapped a hand to his dagger and whispered, "Don't ever do that again."

Tolteca braced his muscles. "What's your idea?" he demanded. "If Bale time really is dangerous—"

Raven leashed himself. "I see your thought. You want to go up there and stand by to protect her, don't you?"

"Yes. Suppose they do lie around in a comatose state. Some animal might sneak past the guard robots and—"

"No. You will stay down here. Everyone will. That's a direct order under my authority as military commander." Raven wet his lips. "Don't you see," he added, "this has been going on for more than a thousand years. By now they have evolved a system which minimizes the hazard.

Most of them survive. The ancestors alone know what delicate balance you may upset by blundering in there."

After another pause: "I've been through this sort of thing before. Sent out men according to the best possible plan, and then sat and waited, knowing my own attempt to help could only throw askew the statistics of their survival. It's even harder to deal with God, who can wear any face." He started trudging. "You'll stay here and wait, like the rest of us."

Tolteca stared after him. Thought trickled into his consciousness. *The hell I will.*

Raven awoke more slowly than usual. He glanced at the clock. Death and plunder, had he been eleven hours asleep? Like a drugged man, too. He still felt tired. Perhaps because there had been evil dreams, he couldn't remember exactly what but they had left a scum of sadness in him. He sat on his bunk edge, rested head in hands, and tried to think. All he seemed able to do, though, was recall his father's castle, hawks nesting in the bell tower, himself about to ride forth and pausing to look down the mountainside, fells and woods and the peasants' niggard fields, then everything hazed into blue hugeness. The wind had tasted of glaciers.

He pushed the orderly buzzer. Kors' big ugly nose came through the door. "Tea," said Raven. He scalded his mouth on it, but enough sluggishness departed him that he could will relaxation. His brain creaked into gear. It wasn't wise after all, simply to wait till the Instar people came home. He'd been too abrupt with Tolteca; but his knowledge had been too new in him. Now he felt able to discuss it. Not that he wanted to. What right had a storeful of greasy Namerican merchants to such a truth? But it was certain to be discovered sometime, by some later expedition; maybe a decent

secrecy could be achieved, if an aristocrat made the first explanation.

Zio pattered after him as he left his cabin and went down a short passage-way to Tolteca's. He knocked, but got no answer. Well, try the saloon.... Captain Utiel sat there with a cigar and an old letter; he became aware of Raven by stages. "No, Commandant," he replied, "I haven't seen Sir Engineer Tolteca for, oh, two or three hours. He was going out to observe high tide from the dike-top, he said, and wouldn't be back for some time. Is it urgent?"

Raven stood motionless before answering: "Possibly. Did he have anyone with him? Or any instruments that you noticed?"

"No. Just a lunch and his sidearm."

Bitterness uncoiled in Raven. "Did you seriously believe he was making a technical survey?"

"Why...well...I didn't really think about it.... Well, he may simply have gone to admire the sight. The tide is impressive, you know."

Raven glanced at his watch. "Won't be high tide for hours."

Utiel sat up straight. "What's the matter?"

"Listen carefully," said Raven. "I am going out too. Stand by to lift ship. Keep someone on the radio. If I don't return, or haven't sent directions to the contrary, within—oh—thirty hours, go into orbit. In that event, and only in that event, one of my men will hand over to you a tape I've left in his care, with an explanation. Do you understand?"

Utiel rose. "I will not be treated in this fashion!" he barked.

"I didn't ask you that, Captain," said Raven. "I asked if you understood my orders."

Utiel grew rigid. "Yes, Commandant," he got out.

Raven went swiftly from the saloon. Once in the corridor, he ran. Kors gaped outside his cabin. "Fetch Wildenvey," said Raven. He clipped a

tape to his personal recorder, dictated, released it, and sealed its container with wax and his family signet. Wildenvey knocked as he was slipping a midget transceiver into his pocket. Raven gave him the tape, with instructions, and added: "See if you can find Miguel Tolteca anywhere about. Roust the whole guard to help. If you do, call me on the radio and I'll head back."

"Where are you going, sir?" asked Kors.

"Into the hills. I am not to be followed."

Kors curled his lip and spat between two long yellow teeth. The gob clanged on a disposer chute. "Very good, sir. Let's go."

"You stay here and take care of my effects."

"Any obscene child of impropriety can do that, sir," said Kors, looking hurt.

Raven glanced at the man and felt his own mouth drawn faintly upward. "As you will, then. But if ever you speak a word about this, I'll yank out your tongue with my bare fingers."

"Aye, sir." Kors opened a drawer and took out a couple of field belts, with supplies and extra ammunition in the pouches.

Raven set Zio carefully on the bunk and stroked him under the chin. Zio purred. He tried to follow the men. Raven pushed him back and closed the door in his face. Zio scolded him in absentia for several minutes.

Emerging from the spaceship, Raven saw that dusk was upon the land. The sky was deeply blue-black, early stars in the east, a last sunset cloud above the western mountains like a streak of clotting blood. He thought he could hear the sea bellow beyond the dike.

"We going far, Commandant?" asked Kors.

"Maybe as far as the Holy City," said Raven. "On the double."

"Holy muckballs!" Kors clipped a

flashbeam to his belt and began jogging.

The first hour they went through open fields. Here and there stood an outlying house, black under blackening heaven. They heard livestock low, and the whir of machinery tending empty farms. If no one ever came back, wondered Raven, how long would the robots continue their routines? How long would the cattle stay tame, the infants alive?

The road ended, the ground rose in waves, only a trail pierced through boles and brush. The Lochlanna halted for a breather. "You're chasing Tolteca, aren't you, Commandant?" asked Kors. "Shall I kill the son of a bitch when we catch him, or do you want to?"

"If we catch him," corrected Raven. "He has a long head start, even though we can travel a good deal faster. No, don't shoot unless he resists arrest." He stopped a second, to underline what followed. "Don't shoot any Gwydiona. Under any circumstances whatsoever."

He fell silent, slumping against a tree in total muscular relaxation, trying to blank his mind. After ten minutes they resumed the march.

Trees and bushes walled either side of the trail, leaves made a low roof over head. It was very dark, only the bobbing light of Kors' flash picked stones and dust into relief. Beyond the soft thud of their feet, they could hear rustlings, creakings, distant chirps and croaks, the cold tinkle of a brook. Once an animal screamed. The air cooled as they climbed, but it always remained mild, and it overflowed with odors. Raven thought he could distinguish the smells of earth and green growth, the damp smell of water when a rivulet crossed the trail, certain individual flower scents; but the rest was unfamiliar. Smell is the most evocative sense, and forgotten things seemed to move below Raven's awareness, but he couldn't identify

them. Overriding all else was the clear brilliant odor of baleflower. In the past few hours, every bush had come to full bloom.

Seen by daylight, tomorrow, the land would look as if it burned.

Time faded. That was a trick you learned early, from the regimental bronzes who instructed noblemen's sons. You needed it, to survive the waiting and the waiting of war without your sanity cracking open. You turned off your conscious mind. Part of it might revive during pauses in the march. Surely it was hard to stop at the halfway point for a drink of water and a bite of field ration, and not think about Elfavy. But it could be done, since it must.

The moon rose over Mount Granis. Passing an open patch of ground and looking downward, Raven saw the whole world turned to silver treetops. Then the forest gulped him again.

Some eight or nine hours after departure, Kors halted with an oath. His flashbeam picked out a thing that scuttled on spiderlike legs, a steel carapace and arms ending in sword blades.

"'S guts!" Raven heard a gun clank from a holster. The thing met the light with impersonal lens eyes, then slipped into the brush.

"Guard robot," said Raven. "It won't attack humans. We're close now, so douse that flash and shut up."

He led the way, cat-cautious in darkness, thinking that Tolteca must indeed have beaten him here. Though probably not by very long. Maybe the situation could still be rescued. He topped the final steep climb and poised on the upper edge of the great amphitheater.

For a moment the moonlight blinded him. She hung gibbous over the Steeps, turning them bone color and drowning stars. Then piece by piece Raven made out detail: mossy tiers curving downward to the valley floor, the ring of towers enclosing the ring-

shaped labyrinth, even the central fountain and its thin mercury-like jet. Even the gardens full of baleflower, though they looked black against all that slender white. He heard a mumbling down in the forum, but couldn't see what went on. With great care he padded forward into the open.

"Hee-ee," said a man who sat on an upper terrace. "That's hollow, Balefriend."

Raven stopped dead. Kors said something raw at his back. Slowly, Raven turned to face the man. He had seen him before, in Instar. Now he sat hugging his knees and grinning. There was blood on his mouth.

"It is, you know," he said. "Hollow. Hollow is God. I hail hollow, hollow hollow hullo."

Raven looked into the man's eyes, but the moonlight was so reflected from them that they stared blank. "Where did the blood come from?" he asked most quietly.

"She was empty," said the man. "Empty and so small. It wasn't good for her to grow up and be hollow. Was it? That much more nothing?" He rubbed his chin, regarded the wet fingers, licked them and said plaintively: "The machines took her away. That wasn't fair. She was only a year and a half hollow."

Raven started down into the chalice.

"She came up about to my waist," said the voice behind him. "I think once, very long ago, before the hollow, I taught her to laugh. I even gave her a name once, and the name was Wormwood." Raven heard him begin to weep.

Kors took out his machine pistol, unclipped the holster and clamped it on as a rifle stock. "Easy there," said Raven, not looking back but recognizing the noise. "You won't need that."

"The muck I won't," said Kors.

"We aren't going to fire on any Gwydiona. And I doubt if Tolteca will give trouble."

They reached level sward and passed under a tower. Raven remembered it was the one he had climbed before. A child stood in the uppermost window, battering herself against the grille and uttering no sound.

Raven went through a colonnade. Just beyond, at the edge of the forum, some fifty Instar people were gathered, mostly men. Their clothes were torn, and even in the moonlight, across meters of distance, Raven could see unshaven chins.

Miguel Tolteca confronted them. "But he killed that little girl!" Tolteca shouted. "He killed her with his bare hands and ran away wiping his mouth. And the robots took the body away. And all you do is stare!"

A man trod forth. Awe blazed on his face. "Under She," he called, his voice rising and falling, with something of the remote quality of a voice heard through fever. "And She is the cold reflector of Ynis, and Ynis Burning Bush, though we taste the river. If the river gives light, O look how my shadow dances!"

"As Gonril danced for his mother," said the one next to him. "Which is joy, since man comes from darkness when he is born."

"Night are Day Faces are God!"

"Dance, God!"

"Howl for God, Vwi burns!"

An old man turned to a young girl, knelt before her and said, "Give me your blessing, Mother." She touched his head with an infinite tenderness.

"But are you all crazy?" wailed Tolteca.

It snarled in the crowd of them. Those who had begun to dance stopped. A man with tangled gray hair advanced on Tolteca, who made a whimpering noise and retreated. Raven recognized Dawyd.

"What do you mean?" asked Dawyd. His tone was metal.

"I mean... I want to say... I don't understand—"

"No," said Dawyd. "What do you mean? What is your significance? Why are you here?"

"T-t-to help—"

They began circling about, closing off Tolteca's retreat. He fumbled after his sidearm, but blindly, as if knowing how few he could shoot before they dragged him down.

"You wear the worst of the Night Faces," groaned Dawyd. "For it is no face at all. It is Chaos. Emptiness. Meaninglessness."

"Hollow," whispered the crowd. "Hollow, hollow, hollow."

Raven squared his shoulders. "Stick close and keep your mouth shut," he ordered Kors. He stepped from the colonnade shadows, into open moonlight, and approached the mob.

Someone on its fringe was first to see him: a big young man, who turned with a bear's growl and shambled to meet the newcomers. Raven halted and let the Gwydiona walk into him. A crook-fingered hand swiped at his eyes. He evaded it, gave a judo twist, and sent the man spinning across the forum.

"He dances!" cried Raven from full lungs. "Dance with him!" He snatched a woman and whirled her away. "Dance on the bridge from Yin to Yang!"

They didn't—quite. They stood quieter than it seemed possible men could stand. Tolteca's mouth fell open. His face was a moonlit lake of sweat. "Raven," he choked, "oa, ylem, Raven—"

"Shut up," muttered the Lochlanna. He edged next to the Namerican. "Stick by me. No sudden movements, and not a word."

Dawyd cringed. "I know you," he said. "You are my soul. And eaten with forever darkness and ever and no, no, no."

Raven raked his memory. He had heard so many myths, there must be one he could use...yes, maybe.... His tones rolled out to fill the space

within the labyrinth:

"There was a time when the Sun-smith ran in the shape of a harbuck with silver horns. A hunter saw him and pursued him. They fled up a mountainside which was all grown over with crisflower, and wherever the harbuck's hoofs touched earth the crisflower bloomed, but wherever the hunter ran it withered. And at last they came to the top of the mountain, whence a river of fire flowed down a sheer cliff. The chasm beyond was cold, and so misty that the hunter could not even see if it had another side. But the harbuck sprang out over the abyss, and sparks showered where his hoofs struck—"

He held himself as still as they, but his eyes flickered back and forth, and he saw in the moonlight how they began to ease. The tiniest thawing stirred within him. He had not been sure he had grasped the complex symbolism of the myth he retold. Certainly he understood its meaning only in a vague way. But it was the right story. It could be interpreted to fit this situation, and thus turn his escape into a dance, which would lead men back into those rites that had evolved out of uncounted manslayings.

Still talking, he backed off, step by infinitesimal step, as if survival possessed its own calculus. Kors drifted beside him, screening Tolteca's shivers from their eyes.

But they followed. And others began to come from the buildings—from the towers, when they had passed through the colonnade again. When Raven put his feet on the first upward tier, a thousand faces must have been turned to him. None said a word, but he could hear them breathing, a sound like the sea beyond Instar's dike.

But now the myth was ended. He climbed another step, and another, always facing back to their upturned eyes. It seemed to him that She had

grown more full since he descended into this valley. But it couldn't have taken that long. Could it?

Tolteca grasped his hand. The American's fingers were ice. Kors' voice would have been inaudible a meter away: "Can we keep on retreating, sir, or d' you think those gooks will rush us?"

"I wish I knew," Raven answered. Even then, he was angered at the word Kors used.

Dawyd spread his arms. "Dance the Sunsmith home!" he shouted.

The knowledge of victory went through Raven like a knife. Nothing but discipline kept him erect. He saw the crowd swirl outward, forming a series of interlocked rings, and hissed to Kors: "We've made it, if we're careful. We have to continue backing up, slowly, waiting between every step, while they dance. If we disappear into the woods at the very end, I think they'll be satisfied."

"What's happening?" The words grated in Tolteca's throat.

"Quiet, I told you!" Raven felt the man stagger against him. Well, he thought, it had been a vicious shock, especially for someone with no real training in death. Talk might keep Tolteca from collapse, and the dancers below—now starting to tread a stately measure, absorbed in it as children—wouldn't be aware that the symbols above them whispered together.

"All right." Raven felt the rhythm of the dance indicate a backward step for him. He guided Tolteca with a hand to the elbow "You came here with some idiotic notion of protecting Elfavy. What then?"

"I, I, I went down...to the plaza.... They were—all mumbling—it didn't make sense, it was ghastly—"

"Not so loud!"

"I saw Dawyd. Tried to talk to him. They all, all got more and more excited. A little girl yelled and ran from me. That man, her father, I swear he

was her father, killed her. The cleaning robots s-s-simply carried off the body. They began...closing in on me—"

"Enough. Now, steady. Another backward step. Halt." Raven stood as if cast in metal, for many heads turned his way. At this distance under the moon, they lacked faces. When their attention had drifted back to the dance, Raven breathed:

"It must be a mutation. Mutation and genetic drift, acting on a small initial population. Maybe that story of theirs is true, they're all descended from one man and two women—though it sounds like a myth—Their metabolism changed. They're all violently allergic to tobacco, for instance. Not that the change was great, in glandular terms. They may well be interfertile with us, biologically speaking. Though culturally, no, I don't believe they are the same species. Not any more."

"Baleflower?" asked Tolteca. His tone was thin and shaky, like a hurt child's.

"Yes. You told me it emits an indole when it blooms. Not one that affects the normal human biochemistry; but still, chemically related to the substances associated with schizophrenia. They are susceptible. Every Gwydiona springtime, they go insane."

The soundless dance below jarred into a quicker, staccato beat. Raven used the chance to climb several tiers in a hurry.

"It's a wonder they survived the first few generations," he said when he must stop again. "Somehow, they did, and began the slow painful adaptation. Naturally, they don't remember the insane episodes. They don't dare. That's the underlying reason why they've never made a scientific investigation of Bale, or taken the preventive measures that look so obvious to us. Instead, they built a religion and a way of life around it. But

only in the first exuberant flush of the season are they even able to admit to themselves that they don't consciously know what happens. They worked out their culture, trial and error, through centuries, until they reached a point where little damage is done in their madness.

"Remember, their psychology isn't truly human. You and I are mixtures, good, bad, indifferent; our conflicts have we always with us. The Gwydiona seem to concentrate all their troubles into these few days. That's why there used to be so much destruction, till they stumbled into ways to cope with it. That's why they are so sane most of the year. In fact, they are so well adapted now that they don't, they can't colonize the rest of the planet. They don't know why, but I do: no baleflower. I wonder what would happen to a Gwydiona taken away from his periodic dementia. I suspect it would be rather horrible.

"Their material organization protects them: strong buildings, no isolated homes, no firearms, no atomic energy, everything that might be harmful or harmed locked away for the duration of hell. The Holy City there, every such spot on the planet, I suppose, is built like a warren, full of places to run and dodge and hide and lock yourself away when homicidal fury breaks loose. The walls are padded, the ground is soft. But of course, the main bulwark is psychological. Myths, symbols, rites, so much a part of their lives that even in their lunacy they remember. Probably more than in their sanity: things they dare not recall when conscious, the wild and tragic symbols, the Night Faces that aren't talked about. Slowly, over the generations, they've groped their way to a system which keeps their world somewhat meaningful, somewhat orderly, while the baleflower blooms. Which actually channels the mania, so that very few people get hurt any more; so they act out their

hates and fear, dance them out, believing their myths are true... instead of clawing each other in the physical eyes."

The dance was losing pattern. It wouldn't end after all, Raven thought, but merely dissolve into aimlessness. Well, that would serve, if he could disappear and be forgotten.

He said to Tolteca, "You had to come bursting into their dream universe and unbalance it. You killed that little girl."

"Oa, name of mercy." The engineer covered his face.

Raven sighed. "Forget it. Partly my fault. I should have told you at once what I surmised."

They were halfway up the terraces when someone broke through the dancers and came bounding toward them. Two, Raven saw, his heart gone hollow. The moonlight cascaded over their blond hair, turning it to frost.

"Stop," called Elfavy, low and with laughter. "Stop, Regan."

He wondered what sort of destiny the accidental likeness of his name to that of a myth would prove to be.

She paused a few steps below him. Byord clutched her hand, looking about from bright soulless eyes. Elfavy brushed a lock off her forehead, a gesture he remembered. "Here is the River Child, Regan," she called. "And you are the rain. And I am the Mother, and darkness in me."

Beyond her shoulder, he saw that others had heard. They were halting in the dance, one by one, and staring up.

"Welcome, then," said Raven. "Go back to your home in the meadows, River Child. Take him home, Bird Maiden."

Byord's small face opened. He screamed.

"Don't eat me, mother!"

Elfavy bent down and embraced him. "No," she crooned, "oh, no, no, no. You shall come to me. Don't you recall it? I was in the ground, and

rain fell on me, and it was dark where I was. Come with me, River Child."

Byord shrieked and tried to break free. She dragged him up toward Raven. From the crowd below, a deep voice lifted: "And the earth drank the rain, and the rain was the earth, and the Mother was the Child and carried Ynis in her arms."

"Jingleballs!" muttered Kors. His scarecrow form slouched forward, to stand between the Commandant and those below. "That tears it."

"I'm afraid so," said Raven.

Dawyd sprang onto the lowest tier. His tone rang like a trumpet: "They came from the sky and violated the Mother! Can you hear the leaves weep?"

"Now what?" Tolteca glared at them, where they surged and shouted. "What do they mean? It's a nightmare, it doesn't make sense!"

"All nightmares make sense," Raven answered. The homicidal urge is awake and looking for something to destroy. And it has just figured out what, too."

"The ship, huh?" Kors hefted his gun.

"Yes," said Raven. "Rainfall is a fertility symbol. So what kind of symbol do you think a spaceship landing on your home soil and discharging its crew is? What would you do to a man who attacked your mother?"

"I hate to shoot those unarmed bastards," said Kors, "but—"

Raven snarled like an animal: "If you do, I'll kill you myself!"

He regained control and drew out his miniradio. "I'll warn Utiel. There mustn't be any spaceship for them to attack when they get there. Then we'll see if we can save our own hides."

Elfavy reached him. She flung Byord at his feet, where the boy sobbed in his terror, having insufficient mythic training to give pattern to that which stirred within him. Elfavy fixed her gaze wide upon Raven. "I

know you," she panted. "You sat on my grave once, and I couldn't sleep."

He thumbed the minirad switch and put the little box to his lips. Her fingernails gashed his hand, which opened in sheer reflex. She snatched the box and flung it from her, further than he would have believed a woman could throw. "No!" she cried. "Don't leave the darkness in me, Regan! You woke me up once!"

Kors started forward. "I'll get it," he snapped. Elfavy pulled his knife from its sheath as he passed and thrust it between his ribs. He sank on all fours, astonished in the moonlight.

Down below, the howl of amok broke loose as they saw. Dawyd shuffled to the minirad box, picked it up, gaped at it, tossed it back into the mob. They halted a moment, a millrace.

Raven stooped over Kors. The soldier bubbled blood: "Get started, Commandant. I'll hold 'em." He picked up his gun and took an unsteady aim.

"No." Raven snatched it from him. "It's us who came to them."

"Horse apples," said Kors, and died.

Raven straightened. He handed Tolteca the gun and the withdrawn dagger, and added his own weapons. "On your way," he said. "You have to reach the ship before they do."

"You go!" Tolteca screamed.

"I'm trained in unarmed combat," said Raven. "I can hold them a good deal longer than you, clerk."

He stood thinking. Elfavy knelt beside him. She clasped his hand. Byord trembled at his feet.

"You might bear in mind next time," said Raven, "that a Lochlanna has obligations."

He gave Tolteca a shove. The American drew a deep breath and ran.

"O the harbuck at the cliff's edge!" called Dawyd joyously. "The arrows of the sun are in him!" He went after Tolteca like a streak. Raven pulled loose from Elfavy, intercepted the

older man, and stiff-armed him. Dawyd rolled down the green steps, into the band of men that yelped, and there they tore him apart.

Raven went back to Elfavy. She still knelt, holding her son, and he had never seen anything so gentle as her smile. "We're next," he said. "But you've time to get away. Run. Lock yourself in a tower room."

Her hair swirled about her shoulders with the gesture of negation. "Sing me the rest."

"You can save Byord too," he begged.

"It's such a beautiful song," said Elfavy.

Raven watched the men of Instar feasting. He hadn't much voice left, but he did his lame best.

*"—'Tis down in yonder garden
green,
Love, where we used to walk,*

*The finest flower that e'er was
seen
Is withered to a stalk.*

*'The stalk is withered dry, my
love,
So will our hearts decay;
So make yourself content, my
love,
Till God calls you away.'*

"Thank you, Regan," said Elfavy. "Will you go now?" he asked.

"I," she said. "How could I? We are the Three."

He sat down beside her, and she leaned against him. His free hand stroked the boy's damp hair.

Presently the crowd uncoiled itself and lumbered up the steps. Raven arose. He moved away from Elfavy, who remained where she was. If he could hold all their attention, she might survive the night.

And not remember.

ATMOSPHERE OF VENUS DANGEROUS?

The possibility was raised recently by three Georgetown University scientists that the atmosphere of Venus may contain a highly poisonous gas, —a gas which would obviously represent a further hazard to be faced by any man eventually landing on Venus.

One of the scientists, Father Francis J. Heyden, S.J., is quoted as saying that the evidence suggested the presence "of an abundance of a toxic nitrogen-containing gas in the atmosphere." It was even possible that the surface of the planet contained amounts of highly corrosive nitric acid, formed from the gas—nitrogen tetroxide. Similar conclusions have also been reached concerning Jupiter's atmosphere.

The assumed presence in the atmosphere of nitrogen tetroxide would obviously affect any ideas of space flight to Venus, Father Heyden pointed out. It might prove necessary for men "to stay continually in their space suits on the planet—or to build blister-like structures to protect them from this gas. They'd never be free to walk around on the planet without a space suit."



PICKUP

BY AIDAN VAN ALM

BUSTER and I always keep our eyes on the sidewalks as we drive through a city or even a small country town. You never know, even in rich, flat states like Indiana, there are a few pretty girls, and it cheers one up to see a decent pair of legs or a genuine pair of the other things—you can tell by their motion.

There's nothing nasty about this. Why shouldn't one look? And if the looked-at sees you looking, ten times out of ten it makes her feel better, and it certainly cheers you up in this gray world of attempted order. Besides, sometimes one can exchange a grin at a traffic light, and that ain't against the law. It's plain common courtesy and good-neighborliness, of which there isn't enough left.

And it was at a traffic light in Vancouver, B.C. that I saw this pair of legs—the top of our car is rather low. We were wandering downtown looking for a Polynesian restaurant we'd heard about. I always want Polynesian food. Vancouver is a lovely city

even when it rains, and its people are really cosmopolitan. They come in all shapes and sizes, and vary in color between three poles—black, white, and yellow—but they all talk with southern Scots accents. It's most intriguing, especially to me who was born in Edinburgh, but it jolts Buster every time because he's a Colorado rancher where the only real oddity, apart from the ubiquitous Texans, is lots of Italians on horseback. But about these legs.

I started at the bottom, naturally, and, leaning down, worked upwards, fully expecting the rest to go to pieces as Canadian girls so often do I have found; it's something to do with the way their hips are slung: if the bottom half is good, the top's usually a washout just like their mountain roads. But if the bottom half looks like the Arc de Triomphe seen from the Place de la Concorde, be prepared. But this was different. By the time I got to the bust-line—which took about nine milliseconds—I was

convinced that I was dealing with something exceptional. Nothing purebred could be built that way and still stand up. Then, I hit the crown, but then the light turned red and I had a moment to take it in. It was fantastic, but I didn't have time to go into that as I was on my way, and otherwise occupied.

Usually, being no first-year rooster, I simply grin admiringly and, if the object doesn't frost up, I throw over some real friendly remark like "Excuse me, no offense, but they simply don't have girls as beautiful as you in California" or something to that quaint effect. As I say, it does no harm, I mean no harm, and it usually turns on good cheer: and then, when the light changes, Buster and I drive on into the great brown yonder, feeling better and, I hope, leaving a little bit of good old-fashioned courtesy behind us. Of course, sometimes the lights take a long time to change and we spend an enchanting if not enchanted evening but that's usually a matter of cash and tact.

On this occasion I neither grinned nor could I say a word. I suppose I must have drooled, which is a disgusting idea and must look horrid. But I got a smile or something that almost put my sacroiliac out again, and then this *Thing* said "Hi! Could you tell me, please, what the name of this city is?"

I stared and started to open my mouth when Buster must needs duck down, so that his eight-gallon hat filled the middle front seat, to get a look. He's a calm, gentlemanly soul with a great sense of humour. He flipped back like a cobra stung by a hornet on its prying snozzle. Somehow I murmured "Vancouver."

"Oh dear!" said the *Thing*. "What country's it in?"

"If you'll tell me the day of the week and the date, which we lost about two weeks ago," I said, "I'll tell you."

"That's time, isn't it?" the *Thing* said.

"Whoops, there goes the light," said Buster.

"Stop! I mean, don't move." I yelled, and Buster stalled her—the car, I mean, not the *Thing*.

Then I leaned almost halfway out of the window and noticed something. In the open air, the *Thing's* voice was ... well.....just everything. It sent all kinds of unmentionable sensations rippling through me. I can only describe it as sounding like *Sleepy Lagoon* played on a Wurlitzer by the late Fats Waller on green chartreuse, in Paris, France. The really funny thing, though, was that the enormous rectangular gash of a deep, flame-colored mouth did not move at all.

"Where do you come from?" I asked innocently.

"I haven't a clue," the *Thing* said.

Now how does she know that expression, I mused with the speed of an IBM machine. She must be British.

"No, I'm not," came the immediate reply.

Oh, My God, I thought, here we go again; men from Mars, gals from Venus, flying-saucers, and every four-bit circuit mind-reader getting in the act.

"I'm not sure that I understand what you're thinking about," the *Thing* said, "but the planets you call Venus and Mars are not inhabited by boys and girls but by rather dreary and nasty things. I'm not a 'circuit mind-reader', whatever that is, but I must say I'm damned confused. You can have whatever you want if you'll give me a hand." Now I ask you!

By this time some guys behind were blowing their horns and Buster was getting nervous and looking like he was getting ready to go back to Colorado. I got out of the car, made a lordly sign to the idiot in the car behind, and helped the *Thing* into the middle seat—so as to have her boxed in. I am not in the least afraid of crooks or consters or even insanes, but I do ob-

ject to pick-ups getting out at the next stop light.

"Onward to Polynesia!" I roared, waving my hand straight ahead. Buster got moving.

"Would you care to take dinner with us?" I asked.

"Delighted," the *Thing* replied..... at least, so Buster tells me, for I had caught sight of those legs spread out and had really for the first time in years gone to pieces. I haven't time to go into all that stuff but, you know, there are a few times in life when you see a member of the opposite sex that is really *so*, you just give up. The amazing thing was that this one was a Doll besides. You can feel these things.

Well, we had a wonderful dinner with all kinds of things I'd never eaten before. The doll was a riot and vague as hell. She came from some planet not at all like ours but about the same temperature and having an oxygenous atmosphere. It was inhabited by what we call—she was able to prove to me categorically—humans; they're a bit more advanced than us but not much and in a proportionately greater mess, with all the usual wars and nonsense. One thing they have found out though, and this, she told us, was how to devote most of one's energy to doing what one wants. They have religions and things but these tell you what to do; never what *not* to do. It helps medicine, and the entertainment business, and birth control but it does not stop wars. It was all very interesting.

Buster was great; talking about horses, and good food, and art which he knows about; and the Doll was fascinated. Then I made the mistake of taking a close look at her again and fainted. It was purely practical; not emotional or anything. She was just too much; even imagining it laid me out. I came-to sitting upright but in the Doll's arms. I went out again. Buster got quite annoyed and the

manager, who was Hawaiian-Chinese, quite excited. We got the bill and the Doll grabbed it. I was too limp to protest. Buster made quite a fuss. The Doll hauled up her skirt and produced what proved to be some 180,000 dollars in used notes of large orders, and threw them on the table. I came-to again as she was saying ".....don't be silly, Dad's got millions, and I've had so much fun". Buster gathered up a few notes with gentlemanly thanks. We got up to leave. Buster gave the manager a bill he had saved for the next crisis. The man dropped dead, I think. We came out into the sunset and climbed into the car.

"Drive me down to the dock," the Doll said.

"What dock?" we inquired in unison.

"Is there more than one?" she asked.

"We don't know," we said, "we've only been here a day."

"It's where they have little, bright, floating things," she said.

I was driving this time and saw a cop. I stopped and asked him about yacht basins. We got into a friendly tassel about the half dozen that were available; then he happened to look down under the roof. Those damned legs were out again. He literally reeled back and we drove away.

It was the fifth dock before the Doll gave a squeal of delight. "That's it," she chimed. "There's the *Nymphotra*." We looked.

And there, parked neatly and serenely between the floating cocktail-shakers was the darnedest, prettiest, little item I'd ever seen. It looked a bit like two huge speed-boats stuck deck to deck one on top of the other. In fact, it was exactly what all large speed-boats should be, so that it cannot take seas aboard, or swamp, or turn-turtle, or, if it does, it doesn't matter. It was painted—or something—a new color. It's not in the spectrum. We drew up at the dock.

"Hi! Miss," said the mariner, real polite. "Not taking her out tonight, are you?" he added.

And that's when I used my brains for the first time.

"Say! You got plenty of cigarettes aboard?" I said, sort of leaning back into the car real casual-like.

"My God! No," the Doll said.

"You smoke Cameos too, don't you?" I asked.

"Sure," she said.

"Say, Buster!" I called, "we're out, too. Be a good fellow and get a few packs from the cafe up there, will you; then we'll look at the boat." I know he loves boats.

He shoved off with measured tread and I helped the Doll aboard. She gave the mariner a lot of money and he started glowing.

"Thanks, Lady!" he said. "Be sure to fly right if you're going out tonight," he added.

"Sure will," the Doll ululated, and the man nearly passed out.

I took a firm grip on the little wire of the gangplank.

"Hurry!" I said.

"Sure," she threw over her shoulder, "and don't worry, I've got plenty of cigarettes."

We jumped down through a sort of hole which immediately closed. There were all sorts of lovely tropical plants growing inside, and there was subdued music with a panting rhythm coming from somewhere. The mariner cranked the plank ashore; there was a low murmur below my feet; and we glided—or is it glid?—smoothly backwards out into the basin.

"Get going," I yelled, for I saw Buster through the forward window—thing heading down the pier.

"Like this?" she asked; and, without any apparent effort, we were airborne and high over the Pacific fog.

Then remorse hit me. After all, Buster has been my closest friend now for quite a number of years, though I never did find out where he

really came from. He just turned up one day, and everybody fell for him with a bang and I felt as if that little brother who hadn't made the grade a few years after I was born had done so. We've had a lot of fun together and got a lot of work done too. I was really sorry to leave him, though I don't believe in all this friendship nonsense, especially in such circumstances. I must have looked bad, too, because the Doll winked at me and said, "Cheer up, slob; it serves him right. He stole my boat a few years back; parked it here somewhere, got drunk, and couldn't find it again. Took me....let me see....ten of your days to find it. So I left his back on the lake at his ranch, took all the cigarettes and liquor and started back here. Then I realized I'd forgotten to ask the name of this place. T-porting is so confusing in this mess."

I began to bubble inside.

"Ha-ha!" I thought. "He's sure to forget cigarettes and rum and get halfway home before he finds out." Then, I took a look at the Doll. It was warm in the skitterboat or whatever you'd call it, and she'd shed. And I must have passed out again.

I'm posting this from some place with a name I can't pronounce but Nona—that's her real name—tells me the mails are pretty good from here, and that you ought to get this in a couple of days. They put the out-of-planet stuff directly in the chute at the central Post Office in your city—shades of the Federal Government! Be a real friend and give Buster a ring long distance, will you? And if he hasn't left yet, tell him to go take a look at the lake and not to forget cigarettes, etc. I'm really contrite. Tell him to hurry because Nga'a is still waiting for him—the nincompoop—and, anyhow, we miss him. If he baulks, tell him I promise I'll drive through the towns for a spell. So long.

THE DETROIT CONVENTION

BY

**FORREST J. ACKERMAN, BELLE C. DIETZ, JOHN MAGNUS,
BURNETT R. TOSKEY and TED E. WHITE**

I HAD TO wait 20 years for the 20th Anniversary World Science Fiction Convention.

It was worth it.

Half my life ago, when I left Hollywood to attend the *First* World Science Fiction Convention in New York, some fans were as yet unborn who recently enjoyed themselves at the adroit Detroit affair.

In 1939 Sam Moskowitz, Historian of Fandom, was a timid youth unused to the sound of his own voice...

John Campbell, thrice Guest of Honor, couldn't tele-path from a howl in the head (this was pre-psionics)...

Skylark Smith's first Lend's Man hadn't yet opened an interstellar hock shop...

Publisher Lloyd (Kong) Eshbach of Fantasy Press didn't have a plot to press in...

Isaac Asimov was still to found his first Foundation (his "foundation" today is rivalled only by Willy Ley's frontal amplitude)...

Robert Bloch had yet to master his first toast...

And Hugo's was a chain of hotdog stands rather than the name, after 75-year-old Father Gernsback, of sci-fi's highest annual award.

Attendance-wise, there was a big difference between the first con and the 20th Annicon: there were about 5 times as many participants in the latest as the earliest and, counting unofficial activities as well as programmed time, the fanta-festivities flourished night and day for nearly a week.

From der voodvork out came such pre-TV, pre-sputnik, pre-Ellison fan-vets as Robert Madle, Julius Unger, Don Ford, Doc Barrett and Joe Christoff to participate in First Fandom's first reunion.

In honor of the late Grand Old Fan, the E. Everett Evans Memorial Award was instituted, and the first Big Heart award made to Robert Bloch who, altho long a thorogoing pro, has also labored long and hard,

above and beyond the call of duty, in the vineyards of fandom.

Sci-fi hit the Big Eye with a national monthly periodical photog in constant attendance, covering for ROGUE magazine all events from the crowded Banquet to the uncovering of such (s) extra-terrestrial models at the Masquerade as Djinn Faine and Virginia Schultheis.

Youngest fan at the Detention—also one of the farthest traveled—was teener Bruce Henstell of Southern California, 13-year-old enthusiast dubbed The Perpetual Motion Boy by a member of the press and singled out by author Randall Garrett as the ideal antidote for T.F.B. (Tired Fan Blood).

Farthest from home was fanne Ingrid Fritzsch, recent journalist arrival from Germany.

Fan Guest of Honor, all the way from Northern Ireland at the good-will expense of American friends, was popular John Berry, contributor of 300 stories and articles to the fanzines of England and the USA, who followed in the footsteps of Bert Campbell, Ted Carnell, Tetsu Yano, Ken Bulmer, Ron Bennett and Walter Willis in demonstrating that "aliens" make excellent fanbassadors.

I look forward 20 years to the 40th Anniversary Sci-Fi Con which, in 1979, may be the First Mooncon, for in this FANTASTIC UNIVERSE most anything can happen. By 2000 A.D. we may be celebrating the Jupitercon, by Jove!

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

Although my overall impressions of the Detention are rather kaleidoscopic a few things do stand out. One memorable portion of the program was the panel entitled "Psionics Under Fire".

I also remember being thankful that the banquet speeches were so

short, that all the speakers were extremely interesting and that all the speeches contained some humor. I was delighted at the choice of the effervescent and witty Isaac Asimov for toastmaster and listened to him with real pleasure; few people are so equally talented in both writing and speaking as Mr. Asimov.

The Masquerade Ball held a great deal of fascination for me with its weird and unusual costumes and keen competition for the prizes. I noticed quite a display of legs and figures among the better looking gals and I was glad I was not one of the judges who had to decide which showed her costume off to best advantage.

Of course, the amateur fan magazine editors' panel which went on at 11:30 one night and continued until 4:00 A.M. the next morning was a most entrancing one. It drew its attendance consecutively rather than collectively; nearly everyone at the convention showed up or participated at one time or another in its marathonic duration.

Very vividly tarrying in my memory is the standing ovation given to Ed Emshwiller for the four movie films he showed, all of which were excellent. One of these, "Dance Chromatic", was in my opinion truly outstanding, combining music, colorful abstract paintings and motion in a manner designed to (and which did) delight the senses.

In the midst of all these program pieces which leap readily to mind are intermingled my remembered glimpses of the convention committee in their unusual jackets. Since the nickname of this, the 17th World Science Fiction Convention, was "Detention" the committee wore white jackets with black horizontal bars. I was highly amused at this and mentally applauded the committee's sense of humor.

Another panel which held a great deal of interest for me, and is therefore permanently pictured in my



mind's eye, was the "Fan Turned Pro" one. Taking part in this were Marion Zimmer Bradley, Damon Knight, Robert Silverberg, Harlan Ellison, Larry Shaw and Jim Harmon, all of whom began their careers writing for amateur science fiction fan magazines. Each explained a bit about how he or she writes and why, but then the panel got off its original track and began discussing whether or not a science fiction writer today is limited in what he can write or whether he can write any sort of story at all and sell it. One of the surprising facts brought out by Harlan Ellison and concurred with by Damon Knight was that a science fiction writer is limited by the "personality" of a particular magazine or the "type" of stories it publishes. If he wants to sell to it he must write its brand of story.

And the final bit of program stands out even among my other impressions. This was the play "Beyond the Unknown" in which the science fiction pros, rather than the fans, were the actors. Some of the lines, joshing the sf editors, were hilarious and the actors appeared to be having as good a time as the audience.

I have an overall feeling of a very pleasantly spent weekend and of being filled to brimming with discussion of my favorite type of literature; there was serious discussion as well as frivolous, but all the kind of thing you can only get at world conventions.

BELLE C. DIETZ

Everybody knows what happens at conventions. American Legionnaires have made them famous for wine, women, and song. Science fiction fans are no different.

But it would insult the intellect of the more serious conventioneers if I suggested that partying was the

only attraction to the hundreds of SF fans convened in Detroit last Labor Day weekend. Editors, writers, and critics sparked controversies that may well motivate some of next year's most important stories. SF artist Ed EMSHwiller stirred up a storm with avant-garde movies he based on space-time abstractions. Original thinking in astronomy was presented in a new theory of Mars' canals. As you can see, all dimensions of science fiction were explored.

The "Detroitcon" was great because it successfully combined the two elements I have mentioned: fun and serious controversy. Previously the two had been strictly separated—business during the day, fun at night. This year, they both met at midnight. The result was not unlike what happens when two halves of an atom bomb combine.

They were joined by an accidental spark of genius that should influence all future "cons." The convention committee had planned a free beer party shortly before midnight Sunday. But because all the speakers had been so long-winded, the fanzine editors panel had been delayed, and was just getting started when the beer began to flow. A few people from the free beer party wandered in to dig the late-late panel, and brought their foaming glasses along for companionship. It didn't take long for the convention committee to get the point. They arranged to have pitcher after pitcher of the sparkling brew transferred into the auditorium. For a while, it looked more like a bucket brigade than a convention.

The informal atmosphere this immediately prompted is one of the greatest things ever to happen at a convention. Enough good ideas were thrown out in minutes to suggest a dozen speeches. Instead of just listening, almost everyone in the audience stood up to have their say.

Fans and pros alike pounded fists, waved arms, and delivered ultima-

tums.

The most urgent question was what could be done to end today's scarcity of science fiction magazines. Three important answers should be echoed here:

1. Make sure science fiction gets good displays on the newsstands. Many fans rearrange displays to the advantage of their favorite magazines.

2. Help other readers distinguish between good and bad in the field, lest readers with limited experience think it is all bad.

3. Letters of praise impress publishers, and make them willing to invest more money in improvements they feel will be appreciated. Drop an enthusiastic note when a magazine does something beyond the call of duty.

It wasn't till three o'clock in the morning that this fabulous meeting broke into smaller parties and adjourned to individual hotel rooms. Issues raised there were still being battled by bleary-eyed fans at breakfast. The high spirits of the meeting carried through the rest of the weekend, until even blearier-eyed fans packed up, caught planes and trains, and settled down to limit their adventures to the arm-chair variety... until next year's convention, that is.

JOHN MAGNUS

As our party of Seattleites was on the verge of leaving the Fort Shelby Hotel, site of the 17th World Science Fiction Convention, and return to Seattle, Hans Santesson, editor of *Fantastic Universe*, was on hand to see us off. It seems that he desires me to write an account of the convention for him. He explained that he was asking a few others from different parts of the country to do the same, in the hopes of getting a varied collection of opinions. I hope that he

chose representatives not only from different sections of the country but also from different facets of science fiction fandom. That is, I hope that there will be a report from some science fiction fan primarily interested



*Top — Lady and friend, at the Masquerade.
Bottom — Belle C. Dietz and Barbara Silverberg*

in Science Fiction, from another whose interests lie mostly in club gatherings and club activities, from another whose interests are more scientific, and perhaps a specialized interest or two, in addition to this report of mine, which is that of a peculiar breed of Science Fiction Fan commonly referred to as a Faaaan, which is the type of Fan whose main interests are in publishing Amateur Fan Magazines and in correspondence with others. In my own particular case, it is even worse than this, for I devote my spare time to publishing these Fan Magazines to such an extent that I no longer have time to read Science Fiction anymore.

The reason I hope that these other reports are from different points of view is that I feel that the Detroit Convention had a program varied enough to suit all needs, and to interest all types of Fans. To a Faaaan, such as myself, the primary reason for attending a World Science Fiction Convention is to meet other publishers of Fan Magazines. In this respect the Detroit Convention was a great success, for I was able to meet and talk with several publishers with whom I had become closely acquainted by this means of communication. Most usually the formally prepared Program of a convention is of very minor importance to a Faaaan; however, for such people, the Convention Committee provided a Fan Publishers Panel on the program, and to many, this was the most exciting occurrence at the convention, for a great controversy occurred when Harlan Ellison asked the panel why Fandom was not producing professionals in the Science Fiction field any longer. The arguments back and forth over this question flew thick and fast. In the midst of the controversy, Hans Santesson delivered an impassioned speech, adjudged by many I have talked with to be the best speech of the entire convention.

For the Science Fiction Fan in-

terested in Science Fiction, there were many professionals on hand to meet, and several items on the formal program aimed at this facet of Fandom. One program item in particular deserves mention, since I feel that it was a stroke of sheer genius on the part of the Convention Committee. Damon Knight, a book reviewer who never seems to say anything good about any book, and P. Schuyler Miller, who never seems to say anything bad, formed a panel of two. Knight had to talk about what was good in science fiction, and Miller had to talk about what was bad in science fiction. Needless to say, the result was highly interesting.

For the fan interested in science, there were talks by Willy Ley and John W. Campbell, and a talk on Mars by Dr. Dean McLaughlin. All three of these lectures were very well attended.

For specialist fans, there were several displays and conferences, including a display of Buck Rogers literature, a Hyborian Conclave, a showing of Art Films of Ed Emshwiller, and other things.

For the fan interested in club and party activities, the Convention committee provided time for many parties sponsored both by themselves and by others, and for the hyper-active, provided opportunities for them to help the Convention Committee to produce a play.

For the Fan interested in collecting magazines, or artwork, there were a large number of magazines for sale by various people, and auctions of artwork almost every day. Harlan Ellison performed the role of auctioneer, and was entertaining and efficient in this respect.

Regardless of anyone's specialized interest, however, everyone who can possibly attend the banquet does so, for this is truly the high point of any convention; Isaac Asimov and Robert Bloch never fail to provide hilarious entertainment when they give



banquet talks, which they virtually always do at Convention banquets.

For Fans who delight in making a spectacle of themselves, there is the inevitable Masquerade Ball, including prizes for costumes in various categories.

On the whole, I feel that the Convention Committee did an extraordinary job in putting on a convention that was enjoyable to all types of Fans, and if reports are written by Fans in other types of interests than mine I expect that they will bear this out. So speaking for myself, I congratulate the Detroit Convention Committee on a truly wonderful convention.

Mention should be made of the rivalry between Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. for the site of next year's convention. Pittsburgh was selected on the first ballot as a result of their very successful campaigning.

BURNETT R. TOSKEY

The Seventeenth World Science Fiction Convention, held in Detroit this year as the "Detention", will probably be reported with considerably mixed feelings. This due mainly to the fact that it was a quite uneven convention.

In size, at an estimated attendance of between three and four hundred, it was the smallest convention in recent years—particularly in comparison with the monster near-1,000 person conventions in Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York. However, the comparative smallness of this year's Con was in no way a detraction. Crowds were more easily handled, one got to see most of the people he wanted to see, and a closer, friendlier air was maintained—this despite a heated fight among three cities for the next year's convention which lead to some power-politicking and sore

feelings among a few partisans.

The program itself, the official portion of the convention, was among the most uneven of its features. As planned, it was superb, laiden as it was with discussions of science fiction by its foremost editors, writers, critics and fans. (This may seem like nothing so special until contrasted with previous years' deadly-dull programs filled with talks about Ceramics In The Future, panegyrics by Company Men on why s-f ought to be training more Engineers To Make Bombs, and Air Force propaganda and recruiting.) In fact, as it turned out, the apparently eminent death of magazine science fiction sparked a greater than ever interest in the stuff itself, the reasons for its acceptance and non-acceptance, and many were the discussions of its problems by people who'd professed not for years to have read 'that crazy Buck Rogers stuff.'

Unfortunately, despite the apparent and actual excellence of the program, its handling by the Convention officials was sloppy, heavy-handed, and often unthinking. The convention program did not officially start until some two hours after the announced time, and then to a series of unplanned episodes which generally resulted only in mutual embarrassment. Various participants of that first session seemed to have no idea what they were doing, no plans for doing it, and not even sure (in one case) where the last year's convention had been held!

Nevertheless, the program resulted in four first-rate sessions, the panels which featured: the editors of *Astounding Science Fiction*, *Amazing & Fantastic*, and this magazine; critics Damon Knight and his feeble sparring mate P. Schuyler Miller; a number of fans turned professional, including Bob Silverberg, Damon Knight, Harlan Ellison, Larry Shaw, and Marion Z. Bradley; and six editors of today's top fan mag-

azines. The latter panel, after being opened to questions from the floor, continued without abate for almost four hours, as the panel members and various people on the floor argued and discussed nearly every phase of science fiction and science fiction fandom. This panel has been acknowledged the hit of the convention, but I think it was within the power of the other panels to likewise spark such interest, except for the fact that they were cut short arbitrarily.

Also on the program and deserving plaudits were the films shown by Ed Emshwiller, the noted s-f illustrator. Here he was less the *illustrator*, and much more the *artist*, as, in a sequence of films, he showed the developing possibilities in filming by time-lapse paintings as they are created. His "Dance Chromatic" brought him a standing ovation.

Behind the scenes it was also a fine convention, as fans from all parts of the continent got together for parties which lasted till dawn, many of them. Noted in particular, if only because we attended them, are Washington D.C.'s Saturday night party at which that city's famous Nuclear Fizzes were served (somewhat less perfect than usual, due to mass-production methods), and an impromptu session with Harlan Ellison in his room after the fanzine editor's panel finally broke up at 3:00 a.m. Monday morning.



SYLVIA WHITE

Highlights must also include what was probably the nudest masquerade ball ever, with the normally sexy costumes of many femme fans failing to catch attention due to the extremes of competition. The music was supplied by a fine local modern jazz group, the "New Art Jazz Sextet".

The convention itself, then? Ragged, with some very high points, and a couple of low ones, rather unpolished and revealing the host city's lack of experience, but due to the taste with which the program was selected, nevertheless one of the finest conventions of this decade.

TED E. WHITE

All photographs illustrating the above roundup of opinions on the Detention were taken by Walter R. Cole, of New York City, and are reproduced here by arrangement with Mr. Cole.

Seen on page 85—

Harlan Ellison, at the auction; Ed Emshwiller, the noted artist—responsible for this month's cover; Dr. E. E. Smith; and Judith Merrill.

Seen on page 87—

Top line—Robert Bloch and James Blish, receiving awards.

Next—Forrest J. Ackerman and Editor Santesson.

Bottom—John Berry and Poul Anderson, Guest of Honor of the Convention.

FANNOTATIONS

BY BELLE C. DIETZ

ONE OF the most interesting items on the program of the recently concluded 17th World Science Fiction Convention was a panel consisting of the editors of fanzines (amateur science fiction fan magazines), some of whom had been publishing regularly for years. These were asked to tell about their fanzines and in so doing, with participation from the audience, the discussion roamed far and wide in the field of science fiction, for a total of four hours.

To begin with, each was introduced and asked to tell what kind of fanzine he publishes. Wally Weber of Seattle, Washington, one of a group of four publishers of *Cry of the Nameless*, explained that it was a general type of fanzine which had started life as a club organ and gradually changed character over the years. It had gone from being completely staff written to being written by the readers (who send in contributions) but, of late, *Cry* has turned into a letter column. It still has articles but the

only purpose of these is to provide something for the letter writers to discuss.

Ted White, now living in New York, co-editor of *Void*, also described it as a general fanzine but one which publishes articles about every type of science fiction with more such articles scheduled for future issues. *Void* too carries a letter column but this is set up in very small type in order to keep the number of pages low; this fanzine runs 24 pages monthly.

Ron Ellik of Berkeley, California, co-editor of *Fanac* (which publication received the 1959 "Hugo" award for the best fanzine) discussed the decision he and Terry Carr, the other editor, made to publish a weekly fanzine which would tell about the doings and activities of science fiction fans. Anything fans do provides the subject matter for this news-and-chat-ter-zine.

Boyd Raeburn, down from Toronto, Canada, who publishes *A Bas* on a very irregular basis, commented that

he publishes in his mag the type of material which is of interest to him. Since most of his readers are people he knows rather well, either through personal contact or correspondence, he feels that what is of interest to him will also be so to them.

John Berry, the fan guest of honor, brought over from Northern Ireland for the convention with funds donated by many science fictions fans, explained that when he started his fanzine, *Retribution*, at the end of 1955 he realized that there were quite a few being published in a similar vein and he tried to get a new slant. To this end he established his "Goon Defective Agency" as a device to write about people humorously. (Mr. Berry is attached to the Belfast Police Force.)

Lastly, Lynn Hickman of Mt. Vernon, Illinois, commented that he publishes exactly what he wants to in the time available to him, so that his fanzine, *JD-Argasssy*, varies anywhere from 8 to 30 pages. However he tries to feature fan news from his own area, along with articles and review columns on books and magazines and convention reports.

The next series of questions put to the panel by the moderator, Bjo Wells of Los Angeles, California, encompassed why each publishes a fanzine, what each looks for in its publication and what importance does such publishing assume to each.

Wally Weber started off again with the startling explanation that he thinks *Cry of the Nameless* is published because it wants to be published and won't let the editors stop. In elucidation, he said that the readers, by virtue of having so many of their letters published in *Cry* wanted it very badly to keep coming out monthly, whereas the four editors found this a heavy task and were constantly struggling to keep the number of pages down. However, he went on to say that they do get something out of amateur publishing, a pleasure

which keeps them at it. Also, they look for the letters coming in and find the readers' comments not only interesting but highly stimulating. As to the importance, he explained that he finds publishing a means of expression and he likes being part of a publishing group.

Ted White said he publishes for two reasons, the first being "egoboo" (fannish term for boosting one's ego), and the second a much more practical one. He found he couldn't afford to subscribe to all the other fanzines being published and did up his own in order to be able to trade issues with other editors. He defined the need for "egoboo" as the desire to see his name in print and to receive favorable letters of comment from readers. With reference to the importance of fan publishing, he explained that he originally wanted to establish himself as some kind of person in fandom (generic term for all science fiction fans); got pleasure out of it even though the actual mimeographing, assembling and mailing could turn out to be a rather monotonous chore. This latter, he opined, might be the reason why some fan editors never get to finish an issue.

On the other hand, Ron Ellik commented that he publishes to circulate news; at the time *Fanac* was begun there were no weekly fanzines devoted to large circulation and dissemination of news about fans. He found that people were amazed that he and Terry Carr could keep up a weekly publishing schedule. He revealed that *Fanac* had upped their incoming mail by about 200% a week, that they continued to publish mainly to get letters; as a matter of fact the mag itself is composed of the news gleaned from such letters.

"To become part of the whole that is fanzine (publishing) fandom", explained Boyd Raeburn. His *A Bas*, like *Cry of the Nameless*, started life as a club organ, folded after 3 such issues and was revived by him as a

general fanzine. He also listed "egoboo", the making of friends by mail whom it is nice to see at conventions, and the fun of publishing (in spite of the work) as the most important factors to him.

John Berry revealed that his sole publishing purpose was to trade for other fanzines, while Lynn Hickman went on record for a trio of reasons—as a means of communication, to receive letters and for "egoboo".

Several more questions were asked of each panel member, encompassing what each considers the ideal for a fanzine, how each came to name his publication (*Cry of the Nameless* was the house organ of a Seattle club, "The Nameless Ones"; *A Bas* is French for "down with"; *Retribution* came from the phrase "retribution will overtake you" on a church mission window; *JD-Argassy* was originally intended to discuss the old magazine "Argosy") and then the floor was thrown open for questions from the audience.

One of the more interesting points brought out was that fanzines usually start out being completely house-written and gradually attract good outside writers when they have more or less proved their quality, so that a brand-new editor can't expect to include really good material unless he himself is capable of producing some.

Then the discussion turned to the fact that fanzines today seem to be writing for smaller and smaller audiences; there appear to be less and less articles about science fiction fans. The panel set forth its idea that fanzines are expressions of individual editors' opinions and that much of the science fiction being written today is not worthy of reviewing, therefore the swing away from that type of article. The panel was asked why more fanzine editors didn't solicit material and stories from some of today's professional writers. "A gulf exists today between the fan and the pro", was the answer; also one is

slightly abashed to request gratuitously material which a pro writer can sell for money.

In connection with this, Bjo, the moderator propounded the theory that perhaps the fans themselves have created this separation by their own actions. She asked how many of the listeners had gone up to the winners of the current "Hugo" awards for best science fiction novel, novelette, short story, etc., and congratulated them on winning. Rather shamefacedly, most admitted they had not. Bjo went on to say that if more fans treated the pro writers as people instead of unreachable celebrities, maintaining of course the respect due individuals who are successful in their careers, the liaison between fans and pros might be a lot better.

The question of why so many fanzines today are apparently shying away from serious topics, such as world affairs, politics or science and are confining themselves to light banter set off a string of explosive comments. The gist of the answer seemed to be that this non-serious trend is a fairly recent development. A possible cause was brought up, namely, that the world situation today is so frightening that much dwelling on it is unpleasant. Science fiction, said a member of the panel, is a form of escape literature; the science fiction fanzines are turning to escapism to get away from the heavy pressures of modern living and to gain, in this hobby, a little peace of mind.

The fact that fanzines are sent to readers each of whom is a potential contributor came up, and it was asked why these readers don't write on serious subjects if they are interested in reading them. If they do not, then they must like the type of light topics being printed in fanzines. However, Pat Ellington of New York City disagreed with this and said that fanzines of every type and kind are being published today; that the reader can

find whatever he wants to see in one fanzine or another.

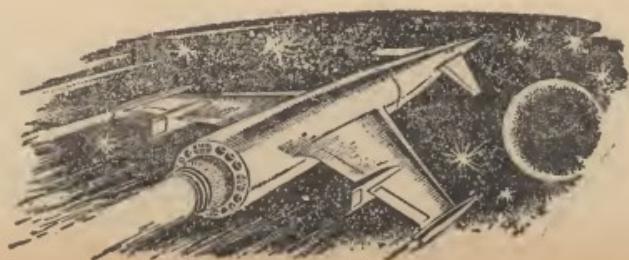
The discussion then turned to the fact that the fans of today are not as enthusiastic about science fiction as the old-time fans used to be. The panel felt that in a way this was true since, as you grow older and gain more experience you have a tendency to become more critical of what you read. A long-standing fan is reluctant to read bad science fiction; if this is his only alternative, he would rather read (or publish) about other fans, especially the ones he has come to know. The fan of today also may feel that his criticisms and suggestions are ignored by professional editors so that he doesn't feel as close to the field as the old time fans did. As Mrs. Ellington concluded, the modern fan may read science fiction but he doesn't feel it's *his*.

On the other side of the picture, the fact that fans today do not support the professional magazines and editors came to the fore. If you want to read good science fiction, you must make it possible by your support and assistance for such to be published, ran the commentary. In other words, the pro publishers and editors may feel that the fans have withdrawn into their own world and are doing nothing but a lot of vociferous downgrading. The support so badly needed by pros today has not been forthcoming. It was said that fans account for only 15% of all newsstand and subscription sales; naturally the editors' purpose is not to cater to so small a

group. Nevertheless, if the fans gave more active support to the magazines by buying them, by urging their friends to buy, by asking for them at as many newsstands as possible, by insisting that their newsstands display science fiction magazines prominently, they might find that their voices would ring more loudly upon editors' ears. Mere destructive criticism without strong support will not gain the fans better science fiction; it will only net them less published science fiction.

The practical problems of pro publishers came up along with the difficulty of properly distributing pro magazines today and the keen and increasing competition of paperbacks. One bright prospect is the larger size or, in some cases, extra pages that the magazines are planning which may help them to get more display space on newsstands and give the reader more for his money.

There was further discussion comparing old-time science fiction to what is being published today and what fans can do to help support their favorite literature and, finally, around 4:00 A. M. this unusual panel dissolved into a number of small groups, each continuing some phase of the subject. Those who had participated or listened came away with a feeling of having gotten something off their chests and, more important, having learned something which, in the final analysis, is the real purpose of this type of panel and which it truly accomplished.



FAIRCON

IN

1964?

by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

President Eisenhower's recommendation of New York as the site for the 1964 World's Fair, and the later concurrence of the International Bureau of Expositions, obviously does not mean that there will be a World Science Fiction Convention here in New York, that summer of '64, unless Fandom, at the 1963 Convention, votes to set aside the rotation plan for this one time.

Opponents of the idea, who include John and Joanne Magnus, Robert and Barbara Silverberg, Dick and Patricia Ellington, Djinn Faine Dickson, Randall Garrett, Bob Pavlat, A. J. Budrys (in other words—some of my favorite people) join Larry and Nordeen Shaw in their opposition to the proposal. Larry, in an open letter to Jimmy Taurasi, endorsed by the above, calls the campaign for a World Convention "for the birds" and goes on to explain why he feels this way.

"In the first place, under the rotation plan, the Con should be on the

West Coast in 1964. I believe the rotation plan is a fair and wise one; I do not want to see it jettisoned or set aside for any reason. If it is, in this instance, it will mean two East Coast Cons in a row, which is flatly ridiculous. The only alternative is to send the Con out of the country entirely in one of the intervening years: if this happens, the Con will properly be in the East in '64, and New York will be free to bid; but unless and until it happens, I do not believe the idea should even be considered (in public, that is—everyone has a right to his private opinions and wishes). I don't want to be unduly pessimistic, but I can see in the offing a series of political maneuvers designed to send the '61, '62 or '63 Con to any country, however undeserving or ill-equipped to hold it, that can be persuaded to accept it, for no other reason than to make it legal for New York to bid for the '64 affair. In plain words, to me this

seems to be a case of selling at least one Con down the river and possibly wrecking the rotational plan entirely, merely in order to give a city that has never put on a good Con a chance to bid on another.

"Further, I see no valid reason for wanting the Con in New York in 1964. To the statement that it will be the 25th anniversary of the First Worldcon, my honest answer is, "So what?" As a fan, I am interested in the future, not in anniversaries of corpses that are better left dead. And even if I thought the historical aspect merited that much consideration, it was the existence of the Con itself, not the site, that was important. If you want to make Sam Moskowitz Guest of Honor at the 25th Anniversary Con in recognition of his having run the first one, I'll be glad to go along with you. But I will not let something that happened 25 years ago ruin a Convention that is happening now for me—and I know of no better way to ruin a Con than to hold it in New York."

Larry raises the point in his letter (distributed through Fanac, FAPA, Philcon, etc.) that the World's Fair being held here in New York is an additional reason NOT to have the Con in New York that year. He does not feel that it would bring more fans to the Convention, but that it would instead bring "casual readers" (*what's wrong with that?*) and bystanders whose presence, he feels, was one of the things that contributed to the failure of the 1956 Convention—"the Convention that practically ended all conventions". (*Some of us can of course think of other things that helped.....*) He states, finally,—"I want my future Conventions legal and I want them pleasant; all the available evidence indicates that New York in '64 would be neither."

This final point is, I feel, decidedly debatable.

It would be stupid to pretend that the wounds left by the '56 Convention have healed.

They haven't.

But this is not sufficient reason to condemn, out of hand, Taurasi's proposal that an attempt be made to bring the 1964 Science Fiction Convention to New York or—if New York fails in its bid—to run a 25th Anniversary regional convention to celebrate the First World Convention held in conjunction with the 1939 World's Fair in New York.

The fact that there are admitted differences of opinion on a number of subjects between two elements in New York fandom (readers of locally published fanzines will need no elaboration on this point) should not be allowed to obscure the fact that there is, at the same time, for the first time in years, cooperation between a majority of the groups in the area. The "Faircon" Committee (In Formation), set up at a meeting in the home of Belle and Frank Dietz in September, is precisely what the title indicates—a Committee IN FORMATION. The temporary officers, active with The Fanvets, The Lunarians, The Eastern Science Fiction Science Association and The Hydra Club, have the organizing know-how to put on a good Convention, but they can do so only if past and even present differences are ignored—by both sides, to be frank—and if it is recognized that *the important thing is the Convention*, whether Regional or otherwise, and NOT the egoboos of people, in the Committee or outside of the Committee.

Let's get together, damn it! Let's put on a Convention—whatever its final designation may be—that will prove we have the people and the know-how to put it across!

have time, will travel!

BY LIN CARTER

A COUPLE of years ago I had the amusingly humiliating task of up-dating a science fiction story of mine. It involved a spaceship yclept the 'Mayflower II', and I had to go through the manuscript laboriously, page by page, and change every 'II' to a 'III'. This sort of thing happens to most SF writers at one time or another; I imagine quite a few of them have been up-dating their work recently, in these post-Sputnik, post-Explorer days. It's one of the occupational hazards you risk when writing SF laid in the near future.

There is one field of science fiction, though, that very seldom involves this kind of revision, and the stories in this school have little if any chance of ever really going out of date. 25 years from now, or 100, or even 500, time-travel fictions will still be readable and current when most, if not all, of our first-spaceship-to-the-Moon (or to Mars, or Alpha Centauri) stories will be only amusing antiquities. Even when history catches up

to the space-pioneering literature, it will still be possible to grind out time-travel tales. As a fictional theme, time-travel can't become dated by technological advance because it is basically unscientific (or even anti-scientific) to begin with, and belongs more to the province of the fairy-tale, than to true science fiction. And fairy-tales, of course, never go out of date at all—because they are not grounded in the everyday world.

So, the harassed hack laboring in his air-conditioned garret need have no fear that the time-travel epic over which he has been sweating, and for which his agent has been clamoring so loudly, will become technologically obsolete tomorrow afternoon, when some third-rate Dr. Huer announces successful tests on his Ultra-Tempolinear Duo-Micronic Chrono-Transportotron. According to all we have learned, *circa* this year of grace 1959, regarding the nature and function of time and the natural laws governing it, time-travel is about as impossible

as Alladin's Lamp or Siegfried's *Tarnkappe*. If someone invents a working time machine tomorrow, or in my lifetime at all, I will be about as completely flummoxed as L. Sprague de Camp would be if Lost Atlantis emerged from the briny deeps next Wednesday, complete with pseudo-Greek temples, *vril*-powered airships, and a race of sage, white-bearded, toga-clad Elders, claiming responsibility for Stonehenge, Angkor Vat and the Sphinx, and asking to be taken to the current leader of the Rosicrucian Society. To come up with a real, functional time-travel gadget, you will first have to come up with a few brand new natural laws—and also do some pretty complete house-cleaning in theoretical and practical physics.

But, of course, the validity of time-travel as a scientific theorem has never interfered with anybody's interest in using it as a fictional device, nor damped the ardor of the SF-reading public, God bless 'em, in buying time-travel stories. The tales continue to entertain and delight despite their very large content of sheer flapdoodle, just as fairy-tales can still divert and amuse, even in this atomic age when even Junior knows there are no pixies in the bottom of the garden. "TT" is a basic staple by now, a standard subject, a sure-fire gimmick with a preconditioned captive audience prepared to salivate (imaginatively speaking) at the first throbbing of a single tempo-tron.

But have you ever wondered just who started it all?

It was not, as almost everybody would be willing to swear, H. G. Wells. Believe it or not, the first story to use a time-machine was not *The Time Machine*. No, the laurels belong to...well, who else but Lewis Carroll?

Let us define terms for a moment. There have been and will be many

different methods and manners of navigating the timestream. One of the oldest ways is to have your hero fall into a magical sleep and do sack time for a couple of centuries before waking up to marvel at how much the old world has changed. This type of non-mechanical time-travel is very ancient. Washington Irving used it, in 1819, for his *Rip Van Winkle*; so did Charles Perrault (1628-1703) for his *Sleeping Beauty of the Wood*; and so did the old Celtic romancers, who used a variation of this theme in their tales of the Land of Youth, the Irish fairyland—as, for instance, in the story of Ossian who rode into Tirnan-Og, spent a few days there, fighting ogres, rescuing maidens, and what-not, then returned to Ireland to visit his father, the hero Finn, and discovered that while he had spent three days in the Land of the Young, three hundred years had passed in the mortal world.

But this is not real time-travel, of course, this is time-travel via a spell or curse, involving use of magic, not mechanism. The very first true time-travel story in literature is to be found in Chapter 21 of Lewis Carroll's neglected masterpiece, *Sylvie and Bruno*. Remember the Professor's square gold watch with the six or eight hands?

"This," he began, "is an Outlandish Watch...which has the peculiar property that, instead of *its* going with the *time*...the *time* goes with *it*." The Professor goes on to explain that when he moves the hands, time moves accordingly. "To move them *forwards*, in *advance* of the true time is impossible: but I can move them as much as a month *backwards*," he says, and proceeds to turn time back a quarter of an hour as proof.

And that, I submit, is the first time-travel story ever written.

But, of course, time-travel as a school of science-fiction really begins, to all extents and purposes, with

Herbert George Wells. A struggling young journalist at the time he wrote the story, Wells was living a hand-to-mouth existence of lodgings at Sevnoaks in Kent. There came a sterile time, when all the magazines that were likely to publish his articles and tales were heavily over-stocked with them. He had previously touched lightly on the idea of time-travel, in a brief piece published in Henley's *National Observer* in 1893. Now he got the idea of making a small novel out of the idea, more to find a new market than for any other reasons.

As he recalled many years later, in a preface to the Random House deluxe edition of *The Time Machine*, published in 1931: "writing it late one summer night by an open window, while a disagreeable landlady grumbled in the darkness outside because of the excessive use of her lamp, expanding to a dreaming world on her unwillingness to go to bed while that lamp was still alight."

The Time Machine: An Invention was published in 1895. Wells took his time-traveller forwards to 800,000 A.D. and then some thirty million years ahead of that. At the end of the tale, he leaves off with the impression given that his hero traveled back into the remote, prehistoric past and met with an accident—or, at any rate, failed to return to the present.

So, although foreshadowed to a large extent in the pages of Lewis Carroll, time-travel really began, as a province of science fiction, with H. G. Wells—and it very nearly ended there, as well. For with that one story, Wells practically exhausted the possibilities of time-travel; he used exactly one-half of the possible variations open to use in this species of science fiction.

For there are only some four things you can do with time-travel. Wells took his hero forwards into the future to see Utopia (and then, all the way up to see the dying earth of the very

far future), next, presumably, backwards into the equally remote past to look at the dinosaurs. So doing, he did two of the four things you can do in time-travel fiction, which may explain why he never used the gimmick in his stories again. For years and years, after Wells' pioneering, writers took their heroes back into the past to see the dinosaurs (or ancient Rome or Atlantis) and forwards into the future to admire the big buildings. They made small changes, true. Sometimes the future was a Wellsian Utopia, but more often it was a religious state, or a technocracy, or a world of ruins after the Great War of Wars, or a slave-empire dominated by yellow fiends from Asia, or tentacled fiends from Mars, or great-brain fiends from Alpha-Q. None of these were anything like major changes, however, they were merely alterations in the decorations. Wells had laid the foundations of the structure.

And there were all sorts of methods of time-travelling, too. Sometimes you had your hero sleep in suspended animation, as in W. H. Hudson's *The Crystal Age*; or you had him die off in the present and be resurrected by Future science, as Van Vogt did in *The Monster*; or he fell into a 'time-flaw' or 'continuum-warp' or some such flim-flammery, as in *Lest Darkness Fall*. On the other hand, he could time-travel by means of the off-stage actions of some god or demon or super-race (see any file of old science fiction magazines), or by employing some non-mechanical *psi* power (see any file of current science fiction magazines). But, however you got him there, and in whichever direction you took him, Mr. Wells had been there before you.

Then, in 1938, along came the third major theme in time-travel, this time the handiwork of Old Master Jack Williamson, who is one of those writers who only seem to hang around in science fiction in order to come up

with a pacemaker every five years or so, and then spend the next half-dozen years resting on their guns while the smaller talents work and re-work and re-re-work their last idea to shreds, whereupon they turn up out of Limbo with a nice shiny new one. This one was called *The Legion of Time*, and it was a real doozy. Williamson, by some private alchemy of his own, concocted the notion that the future is variable, that any number of alternate tomorrows are just waiting to come true, providing enough 'probability potential', or something, swings the weight of time their way. This novel (it was serialized in *Astounding*, and Fantasy Press brought it out, years later, between hard covers) started the time-paradox school, although minor and isolated, uncristallized examples can be found earlier. Williamson's hero is constantly being influenced by emissaries of both of the two major alternate 'futures' who co-exist with equal possibility until the decision-point has been passed, and then, all of a sudden one of them never existed at all. This was a honey of an idea and the other writers jumped all over it, and in no time (pardon the pun!) were sending their characters back into the past to shoot their grandfathers or Julius Caesar, and so on—and on.

It's a fascinating field for fictional conjecture, and they haven't tired of plowing it yet. Fritz Leiber, Jr., in his recent serial, *The Big Time* (*Galaxy*, 1958), had two obscure, opposed races called the Snakes and the Spiders fighting a time-war using humans plucked from a wide variety of eras who zoomed around the time-stream assassinating Cleopatra, kidnapping the infant Einstein, etc., changing history in the future.

In 1939, a year after the Williamson novel, along came the fourth and final milestone in TT: a story by one Murray Leinster, also an old pro, called *Sidewise in Time*, which just

about completed the time-travel repertoire. If you don't want to take your characters forward into the future to see the big buildings, or back into the past to look at Atlantis or the dinosaurs, or poison Lucrezia Borgia and alter the 25th Century, you can always—says Leinster—take him sideways into one of the parallel worlds of what-might-have-been-had-Napoleon-flunked - highschool-or-Columbus-gotten-seasick. The main gimmick of this sub-school is, if Attila the Hun, for instance, had not been turned back at the gates of Rome by Pope Leo the Great in 452 A.D., the world of here-and-now would be very different; and that somewhere in space-time there is an alternate 'today' in whose past history Attila went on to conquer Rome and everything else, which made 1959 a slave-world ruled by his descendants. And somewhere else is another 'present' in which Alexander didn't go swimming that night in Babylon and didn't come down with a runny nose, and thus lived another decade or two and conquered China after all—in fact, an infinite number of variant 'todays' in which any conceivable alternate 'present' is really happening. Leinster's story was so brilliantly original a conception that it not only gave time-travel fiction a shot in the arm, but gave him the honor of writing the first ASF "thought-variant" yarn. The pros were, as always, quick to jump on this bandwagon, too. And the following year when, in *Unknown*, L. Sprague de Camp came up with a fine variation on the Leinster idea, in a story called *The Wheels of If*, which later became the title-piece of his 1948 *Shasta* collection, the sub-school was confirmed. *Wheels* attracted a lot of favorable comment, and science fiction writers have been going around in the same old groove ever since.

And then, out of a clear blue sky, Robert A. Heinlein came up with an-

other variation on the Theme so clever and original as to almost create another, fifth, class of time-travel fiction. He polished off a little gem called *By His Bootstraps* (*Astounding*, Oct. 1941), that is actually more of a *tour de force* than another milestone. You recall it, the story with five or six characters, all of whom turn out to be the same person—at different times. Instead of taking his hero into the past to ogle pleistosaurs, or into the future to rubber-neck at strato-scrapers, or to alter the present by giving Savonarola a hot-foot, or even sideways to take a look at King Washington XIV of Imperial America, he took him *around in a circle to see himself*.

Now, when I first read this one I was convinced it was so much of a *tour de force* that nobody—not nobody, not nohow, not nowhere—could ever use this plot twist again, and so it couldn't begin a new division of TT. But, lo and behold, about eighteen years later Heinlein did the same story all over again in *All You Zombies* (*F&SF*, March, 1959). The twist on the original twist was, in this case, a girl is seduced and made pregnant by *herself* (who changed sex at a later date and came back in time as a man), and later gave birth to *herself*, or himself, or them, or something like that. Which only serves to complicate an originally pretty complicated plot, and I am presently convinced that not nobody, not nowhere, not nohow can give this gimmick *another* twist—but I'm willing to grant Heinlein eighteen more years to come up with one!

THERE HAVE been no significant contributions to the school since then, although of course many fine time-travel stories have appeared and continue to appear. In 1939, *Argosy* published Arthur Leo Zagat's *Seven Out of Time*, a novel later reprinted by Fantasy Press in 1949: its plot concerned the removal from ordinary

time of seven persons from different ages, and an Otherworld beyond time. A. E. Van Vogt's 'Weapon Shops' series in *Astounding* and elsewhere involved a wide variety of time-travel gimmickery, including a sort of pendulum, swinging from past to future and gaining a sort of static electric charge with every swing, which, when finally released, created so vast an explosion in the very remote past that it turned out to have created the universe. In 1955, the two most important recent additions to the literature both appeared: Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity*, which concerned itself with an organization of Eternals who range through time monitoring and correcting the cause-and-effect sequences in history. In Ike's story, the centuries are numbered and the Eternals go zipping up and down the timetrack like riding past different floors in a fast elevator. The second novel that came out that year was a honey of a yarn by English author Charles Eric Maine, *Timeliner*, in which a scientist goes zooming into the future, reincarnated from body to body like a fussy Buddhist. This time-travel-by-reincarnation was rather new. Prominent among TT fictions as yet unpreserved in book-form is H. Beam Piper's 'Paratime Police' series, from *Astounding* in the early '50's, which attracted much favorable attention.

And early in 1959, John Brunner's Ace novel, *The 100th Millennium* appeared. It gave a colorful, vigorous and fresh picture of a vastly advanced culture to whose degenerate citizens an interesting form of mental time-travel has become an addiction. By a species of telepathy they search back through preceding ages until they find an era whose over-all moral, physical and cultural flavor appeals to them. They then spend the remainder of their lives living in a sort of dream, wearing the antique styles of their favorite eras and acting out,

through telepathic communion with inhabitants of that earlier age, a typical lifetime. Later in the book when earth was threatened by a cataclysm, a mental search through past ages was needed to dig up forgotten or neglected skills and lost scientific knowledge with which to combat the menace.

But none of these stories, and, in fact, no story since *Sidewise in Time* has contributed a fresh, unused basic concept to the literature. This lack of any bright, new plot-twist, however, has not deterred the time-travel writers from their appointed rounds. Far from it. Although by now all of the four plots have been used, re-hashed, and used again, nobody gets tired of time-travel fiction. And there is al-

ways the delectable possibility that one of these days, somebody—anybody!—may come up with another, fifth, way of using time-travel.

Well...whether they do or not, writers of TT need have no fear of their fictions becoming obsolete. Ages from now most probably, when we are flitting from galaxy to galaxy as easily as crossing the street, there will still be time-travel stories written and published in whatever medium the SF magazines will have evolved into by then, long after most other of the standard SF gimmicks have passed from the realm of imagination into the domain of historic fact.

And I bet there will still be people around like you and I, to read them.

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THE CURRENT CATALOGUE

BY JESS SHELTON

CHARLIE and Sarah Simpson were simple, as unassuming as old furniture. Life for them was a smooth flow of crocheting and pipe-smoking and the reminiscent, easy gossip of the aged. In fact, now that their children had grown and gone to places unknown to the Ozark hills, now that money flowed through the mails, Charlie had developed the notion that everything comes to him who (sits around and) waits. For it did: steady checks from Arthur and little Charlie and from the Government. With the money, ease and simplicity.

Until the electricity, until the mail order catalogue, until the strange, inexplicable things.

The catalogue had arrived unbidden in the mail one day, with an explanatory letter discussing the virtues of electric appliances. Struck by the lavish color photographs of the new things, Sarah and Charlie filled out a form, signed it, folded money in an envelope, and waited.

Charlie's hands were shaking. "Hur-

ry," said Sarah. "I cain't hardly wait!" "Now, now," he murmured.

"Hit ain't ever day we git new things."

With an explosive grunt, Charlie ripped the top off the package. The second was easier. Putting the boxes aside, he stood back with Sarah to admire the appliances. The chromium of the electric roaster and coffee maker gleamed eerily on the table, but to the old couple the luster was no more than the anticipated beauty of new things.

"Let's try em out," Sarah suggested, her voice low and reverent.

Charlie looked about, jabbed his hand into the cartons. "There ain't no directions," he said.

"The catalogue." When he got it from the porch swing, they sat side by side at the table and read the descriptions of the appliances. "It just says," Sarah told him, "the roaster cooks a whole meal at once. And the coffee pot is called a coffee maker." She turned her head to glance into his

worried face. "Plug the coffee pot in," she said.

Charlie looked like he was in pain. "Just plug it in?"

"Ain't it a coffee maker?"

He gazed at her for a moment longer, his face almost touching hers. Shrugging his shoulders then, he leaned down and stuck the plug into the wall outlet. "Hit ain't doing nothing," he grumbled.

Sarah pursed her lips. "You got to wait. It'll start."

"But them things is empty!"

Sarah sighed. "Does the catalogue say ere thing about that? Now, does it?"

He reread the description. "No, I reckon not," he whispered. "But it does seem like..." He cut off his voice.

The coffee maker was hissing, ever so slightly.

This was the beginning. Every afternoon they sat in the kitchen, the heart of the house, where they had sat through the years, secure in the peace of their aging, understanding little and caring less about the world outside the ridges bordering their valley. But now the cabinet, which for so long had sheltered Sarah's blue china and cut glass, displayed the strangely gleaming appliances. The things made themselves known always—glittering brightly in the daytime, and in the black of night standing out in their places with ghostly luminescence.

Striking a wooden match on his pants leg, Charlie puffed on his pipe, shook out the match flame then as he glanced toward the cabinet. "What we going to have?" he said, cocking his eyebrows apprehensively.

Sarah winked. "Coffee, anyhow. We know that. Get the roaster down, too."

"Do we have to?" His lined face paled. "That stuff last evenin'..."

"Now, Charlie. We went to all the trouble to send for them fancy machines and pay for them, so we got to put them to use. Hit just ain't right

not to."

Grimacing, he placed the roaster on the kitchen table, unwrapped the cord, and plugged it into the shiny new wall outlet. "Coffee yet?"

She nodded. "I'll git us some cups and saucers."

It took a little while. The roaster always took longer, of course, so they were most concerned at first with the coffee maker. For two minutes it was silent; then slight hissing noises began, and barely perceptible electrical gurgles. Charlie and Sarah leaned closer toward it and remained motionless as the house grew silent save for the hissing. With a startling sound, the tiny gurgle grew louder and more liquid, then became a loud boiling, splashing quickly darkening a m'ber coffee against the glass percolator top. Charlie and Sarah let out their imprisoned breath and slumped in their chairs.

They waited for the roaster while they drank their coffee.

"Hit ought to commence soon," Charlie remarked.

"Well, hit usual takes a half hour or so to git going."

He glanced at the old clock on the back wall. "It's a half hour now, anyways."

Sarah stuck out her hand to shush him. "There it is," she whispered. "Listen!"

The electric roaster had been emitting tiny hisses for a while, but Charlie and Sarah had agreed never to count them. Now came a loud popping, the spitting of hot grease and the sizzling of meat cooking in the intense heat. They listened to it for a few moments, then got up from the table and began to take dishes from the bottom of the cupboard.

"Hit smells good this time," Charlie murmured.

"Beef, maybe?" Sarah leaned close to the roaster and sniffed.

"I surely hope so. We ain't had no beef outer it since Wednesday."

"There's lots of kinds of meat."

"I know that!" Charlie grunted. "But it does seem as how they'd have beef a little more, since folks everywhere like it so." He sniffed at the roaster. "Dare I peek?"

Sarah put her hand to her mouth to think for a moment. "The catalogue don't say ere thing about peeking," she decided.

"It ought to be all right."

"Well, I don't know...." She looked bleakly at him.

"All right, woman," he grunted, plopping back down in his chair. "I won't do it."

"Now, Charlie. I—I reckon you can peek if you're a mind to. I just said: the catalogue don't say ere thing about it."

"All right, all right! I'll do it like it says. If it don't say nothing about peeking, and we cain't tell what we're gonna have for supper, I ain't gonna peek!"

"Hit does *smell* like beef."

He nodded his head grumpily. "Mmmph," he said.

Another forty minutes remained before the roaster gurgled, spat, and sizzled its last. As the kitchen grew still, Charlie and Sarah sat rigid in their chairs, staring at the shimmering chrome of the appliance. Sarah got up nervously then, almost tipping over her chair. Charlie dropped ashes from his pipe and had to lean down to blow them from his supper plate.

"Go on, woman," he urged her. "Open it."

She hesitated. "Why don't you? I did last evening."

Charlie tipped the roaster cover to let the steam escape, and looked in. "It is beef!" he croaked. "Sarah, we got beef this time!"

Mopping her forehead with her apron, Sarah waved her hand a' him. "Well, take it out," she snapped. "A person'd think you never seen a new cooker before!"

"Howdy, Rogers!" Charlie waved to the mail truck driver. Two letters

in his hand, Rogers came easily up the walk and tipped his hat to Sarah. "Howdo, folks," he said.

"Something for us?" she asked.

"Letter from little Charlie," Rogers replied, glancing at the mail. "And one from—uh, well, hit ain't got no return address." Reluctantly he handed the letters to her and stood watching, with wrinkles forming around his eyes.

"How's everthing?" Charlie asked him.

Rogers scratched his head. "Cain't kick." He attempted to look at the letters again, but Sarah tipped up the one she was reading. "How's little Charlie?"

Sarah smiled. "Oh, he's fine, thank you."

"Mmmm. How you all like them electric gadgets you got?"

"Tolerable," Charlie said.

"You was smart. I'm figuring on gitting me one of them store catalogues, too." He glanced again at the letters, but noticing Sarah's raised eyebrows he shrugged his arms and started back to his truck.

"They're all right," Charlie said, with a crack in his voice. "Like the catalogue says, at least they save us money."

Rogers said, "I reckon," got into his truck, gunned the motor, and waved.

Sarah looked at the cloud of dust down the road. "He's about the noisiest man on two legs."

"What is in the letter?"

She handed it to him. It was from the mail order company.

"Dear Customer," it read:

"We hope your recent purchases from our current catalogue are satisfactory. Unfortunate as such matters can be, even with our careful quality control we sometimes do encounter a problem of an appliance not performing to specifications. Because we are anxious to please each customer, do not

hesitate to inform us if you have any inquiries or needs for service on your appliances.

Thank you again for joining our thousands of satisfied customers."

"You see this?" Charlie pressed his finger against the letter. "A'bout being anxious to please?"

Sarah nodded. "I did. I don't reckon folks'd complain, do you?"

"Oh, we been savin money on food. Trouble is, I'm half a mind to write them and ask if they cain't fix that roaster oven."

"Hit works all right."

He frowned at her and sniffed contemptuously. "You women don't know a thing about machines! If it worked all right, you'd think you'd know what you was goin to have for supper. Hit just don't seem right, not knowing ever day, waiting like we do, getting all upset till we find out if hit's ere thing we can eat."

With her chin cupped in her small hand, Sarah was thinking, physically concentrating. "You know," she murmured. "They say them things is for the modern housewife, not old fashioned folks. Now, I ain't a *modern* housewife, cause that means a young snip of a thing, and—"

"Well, you ain't no young snip," he observed.

"Charlie Simpson!"

He waved his pipe at her. "Go on, girl," he said.

Sarah grinned. "Maybe them things is just for young folks, who can eat ere thing it makes. I'm thinkin of lookin in that catalogue just to..." He sat beside her on the porch seat as she opened the slick colorful catalogue. "Here," she said. "Hit says, *Cooks a whole meal at once*. It does that, don't it?"

Charlie was stuffing tobacco into his pipe. "I reckon so," he agreed. "But it don't say what kind of meal."

"It cooks all kinds."

"I know! But we still don't know from day to day—"

"We only had it a little bettern a week. Mayhap it runs in a circle, pork one day, beef the next, then chicken, like that."

Charlie sat smoking silently for a while. "You got a point, woman. Once we figger the pattern..."

Sarah glanced at the catalogue again. "Look," she said, her fingers caressing a photograph of a kitchen table with several gleaming appliances on it: a pop-up toaster, a coffee maker, an electric skillet. "Now there's somethin we could use! There's one of them frying pans you just plug in. It says here it *cooks bacon and eggs beautifully every time*."

"That does sound good," Charlie agreed as he looked closely at the picture.

"And this here toaster, too. Hit says it *works almost like magic. No levers to pull. Just set dial for shade of toast you want*. Don't that sound handy?"

"Hit ought to be."

"Why don't we send for them?"

He laid his hand across hers on the catalogue. "Not yet, Sarah. I want to write them folks and settle up about that roaster over first. Then, if we don't git no satisfaction, we'll buy these here things. We can have bacon and eggs, anyhow, if we don't like what the roaster makes."

"The roaster works all right, Charlie!"

"Git me a pencil and paper, woman, and don't argue."

A half hour later he sighed, dropped the pencil to the table, and read the letter to Sarah:

"Dear sir, I got to admit your electric things is mighty handy and my wife nor I cant complain as how they aint saved us money on food for they has. Now I got a problem with the roaster over for it dont work proper. Dont you folks take hurt at what Im saying for I know how them things goes. Sometime a machin dont work right and I know you will fix it.

What it is is the roster oven works alright but were old folks and wed kind of like to know whats for supper but we dont ever know for we cant tell till we open the roster oven. yours truly

Charlie W. Simpson rt 6 Possum Mo.

Sarah sniffed. "Well," she said. "We'll see what them folks got to say in a couple days or so."

The return letter arrived six days later. Charlie and Sarah rushed into the house to open it, leaving nosy Rogers standing out in the yard.

"Go on," she urged him nervously. "Read it."

Charlie grunted once or twice, adjusted his glasses, and held the letter a good two feet from his face. "Here's what it says," he said:

"Dear Mr. Simpson:

We received your letter of the 28th in regard to the electric roaster you recently purchased from our company. We sincerely want to have satisfied customers, Mr. Simpson, please believe this, and we shall do everything within our power to please you. We regret to inform you that your letter of the 28th left us somewhat in doubt as to the exact complaint which you have to make about the electric oven. Would you write again, and answer the following questions:

1. *Do you plug the appliance into a 110-120 volt outlet?*
2. *Does the appliance heat up on all sides and on the bottom?*
3. *Do you give the appliance sufficient time to cook your food?*
4. *Has the appliance ever burned your food or undercooked it, when given the sufficient amount of cooking time?*

Please answer these questions, and we will reply immediately.

Remember: we wish to satisfy!"

Charlie gestured at Sarah. "Paper and pencil," he grunted. "Them folks

just don't seem to understand."

"Be sure to answer them questions," she warned him.

"I will," he growled. He began to write, his hand angry, his mouth forming the words, and a few minutes later read her his reply:

"Dear sir. I thout I made things cleer in my first letter but I will tell you again. But first I will anser your questions. One we plug in the roster oven alright, two the roster oven heats up proper all the way around, three, we set and wate by the table every evening till the roster oven goes off, four we aint complaining as how it burns food or dont cook it right for the food is always cooked to a tern but WE DONT KNOW WHAT WERE GOING TO HAVE FOR SUPPER. The roster oven works fine and we got no complant about it but want to know how we can tell what were going to have for supper. If you can tell us wed be mighty pleased. Yours truly Charlie Simpson rt 6. Possom Mo."

"That says it," Sarah agreed, with a nod of her gray head.

Charlie licked the envelope and rubbed it on the table top. "Next time," he grumbled. "Maybe they'll up and tell us."

Again they waited for six days, left nosy Rogers the mailman standing curious in the yard, and rushed inside to open the letter from the catalogue company.

"Dear Mr. Simpson:

As to your letter of the 5th, we are happy to learn that your electric oven is working properly. As you said, your electricity is sufficient, the roaster heats properly, and you have no complaints about food being undercooked or burned.

Now, about your other complaint. We fear that our company can do little to remedy such a problem. Perhaps it might be wise for you to talk to your

wife. We have found, in our own marital situations, that such little conflicts occur in the best-run of homes, and that the solution is relatively easy: ask her, sir, what she plans to have for supper. Then, if she is kind enough to tell you, you will know, and your family will once more be the well-knit, happy sort.

Thank you again. If there is any further trouble, please do not hesitate to write us. Remember: we wish to satisfy!"

Charlie looked darkly at Sarah. "Did you know all along?" he growled.

"I swear I didn't, Charlie!"

He tapped the letter with his forefinger. "You heard what the letter said."

She pushed her hand up alongside her forehead. "Mayhap I'm too old," she murmured.

"You ain't too old! You jest been keepin things from me!"

Her eyes were wet by now. It made him nervous, madder because he was nervous. "Don't go and bawl," he grumbled at her. She continued to shake her head and cry softly. "You got no call to." He rubbed his mouth, looked at the letter again. "Just stop it, now."

"I'm too old," she said, shaking her head. "Just too old!"

Charlie crumpled the letter into a ball and threw it across the room. "Look here," he said. "We ain't neither of us spring chickens, are we? You stop crying, now." But her eyes were still wet. "You cain't help it if you're gittin up in years and ain't able to know like them modern housewives is." He sighed with relief when she wiped her eyes and smiled at him. "Hey, I tell you what. You recall a couple of weeks back, how we talked about that thing cooks eggs and bacon, and tother what makes toast?"

"Yes, Charlie?" she said hesitantly.

"Let's order em! Then we ain't got no worry from that roster oven!"

The packages came six days later, sealed in cardboard cartons like the others. "You want to try them?" Charlie said. Sarah nodded, her eyes hungry on the two appliances. "Both of em?"

She nodded again. "Go on, Charlie. Ain't you just dyin to see?"

"Want some coffee, too, while we're at it?"

"Charlie, please?"

"All right, woman." He patted her shoulder. "Dont git upset. Them're just modern doodads, like the others, and there ain't no call to act silly."

"Go on, then, and plug in the coffee maker." She hurried to the cupboard. "Wait, don't plug in them others yet! I want to git us some dishes, then we can set and watch."

With the table set and Sarah in her chair, Charlie plugged the two new appliances into the wall outlet. "It takes a while," he said.

"Ain't it funny the way they always shine?"

Charlie couldn't take his eyes from the appliances. "Yes," he breathed. "Like as if you had to just set and look."

"Maybe that's what makes em work."

"No, that's foolish! They're made that way in the factory!"

The toaster began first. It hissed slightly as the heat from the elements crept up through its sides; then it began to tick audibly, counted off time for a while, and with a sharp snapping sound popped up two pieces of golden brown toast.

"Unplug it now," said Sarah. She was breathing hard. "We can have more after while."

The electric skillet began. Its shiny aluminum surface had been bare and dry after John had taken it from the paper box. Now something was forming in it, a lustrous film of grease, popping lightly from the heat. Gradually, dimly perceptible streaks of brown,

and yellow and white rounded forms, appeared.

"Ain't it weird?" Charlie whispered.

"O Lord. I ain't sure how long it'll take me to git used to that!"

The following day went smoothly. For breakfast they had coffee made by the coffeemaker, bacon and eggs which they watched mystically form out of the empty skillet, and toast. It was cinnamon toast, something new to them, but Sarah bravely took some and pronounced that it was better than the ordinary kind. Their lunch was lighter: merely some crackers and cheese. That was fortunate, they realized later, for at suppertime they opened the electric roaster to find a ten pound turkey with dressing, sweet potatoes, and green peas.

Yet every afternoon their nerves tautened, Charlie snapping at Sarah more and more each day, grumbling to himself as he walked about the house, complaining steadily as the two of them began to wonder what would be in the steaming roaster for supper. Even breakfast, after a few days, became just as bad.

"I like my eggs turned over!" Charlie snapped one morning.

"We tried it, but they won't turn over."

Picking at his teeth, he looked glumly at the sunny-side-up eggs in his plate. "I cain't figure why they don't," he muttered.

"I declare, you're actin older ever day! That's just how it's made! What do you expect for fourteen dollars?"

"Mmmph, I ain't so sure I like raisin bread toast, neither."

Sarah was buttering a slice of it. "It's good," she said, taking a bite.

He watched her painfully. "That thing's made toast out of bread I never seen in all my life! Cinnamon bread, raisin bread, some black doughy stuff with kernels in it..."

Sarah poured herself a cup of coffee from the glittering coffeemaker.

"Hit's time you got modern, old man. Hit's kind of nice, anyways," she added, nodding to herself. "Having different things all the time."

Looking distastefully at the raisin bread toast, Charlie wrinkled his nose and took a bite. "I cain't take too much more of it, no matter what that catalogue says," he grumbled.

Early the next morning—it was scarcely daylight—Sarah turned in bed, then sat upright as she heard the sounds in the kitchen. Slipping on her robe she started to call out to Charlie, but for some reason stopped herself, and, instead, tiptoed silently down the stairs. Charlie was already dressed, standing by the old woodstove. The kitchen was filled with a soft warmth from the fire, with the fragrant odor of boiling coffee. Walking to the cooler, Charlie got out four eggs, broke and dropped them one by one into the popping fat of the old iron skillet. With a deft scoop of the turner he transferred several strips of bacon from a plate to the skillet.

After he set the table the food was about ready. He flipped the eggs over, waited a moment, and scooped them out. Then he poured the coffee from the old porcelain pot, got out a jar of strawberry preserves, and sat down in his usual place.

"I fixed enough for both," he said, in a matter of fact voice, without even looking at her. "You might as well set and eat something."

She saw that her blue china and cut glass were back in their old place in the cupboard. The appliances were nowhere in sight. She put her hand on his arm and said, "Charlie, I love you."

He looked at her. His thick gray brows were pulled down, and his right cheek dimpled as he sucked at one of his teeth. Then laugh wrinkles formed at the corners of his eyes. "You try them eggs and bacon," he ordered her. "And you tell me if you ever et better."

She obeyed him. Before she finished chewing the first mouthful, she nodded her head. "I declare, Charlie, you're right."

They were sitting on the porch later in the morning, the soft warmth of the June day hovering gently about the marigold-bordered yard. Sarah had the catalogue in her lap, fingering its slick pages, as Charlie watched languidly for the mail truck.

"After a while she said, "Charlie?"

"Hmmm?"

"Don't it seem kind of a shame, just to throw them away like that?"

He grinned confidently. "Some things is more important than others, ain't they?"

"Charlie?"

"Yeah?"

She touched the catalogue with her finger. "Look at this. A ice cream maker. You just plug it in the wall, and..." Her voice trailed off as he saw the expression on his face.

"I did forget one thing," he muttered, his pipe clenched between his teeth. He was up quickly, snatched the catalogue out of her lap, and disappeared around behind the house.

When he came back to the front porch, Sarah said, "Charlie, what did—"

He was laughing now, his eyes twinkling. "Now," he said. "Wasn't you about to tell me what we was gonna have for supper?"

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AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

James V. Taurasi makes the point, in a recent issue of *Science-Fiction Times*, that some of the material we run in this magazine—I imagine he was referring to both Marla Baxter's LIFE FORM FROM OUTER SPACE and to Van Rowe's HUMAN AURIC EMANATIONS, both of which appeared in the October *Fantastic Universe*—does not belong in a Science Fiction magazine.

James Blish, author of the superb **A CASE FOR CONSCIENCE** (Ballantine Books) had this to say in the course of a personal letter—commenting on the November issue—

"Let me add my voice, though, to those protesting the continuation of the occultist stuff, particularly when it's presented as "special fact articles". In the present instance, Lester del Rey cogently presents a problem of real urgency which deserves the careful thought of everyone; but its impact is almost destroyed by Mr. Y. ibn Aharon's pseudo-scholarly attempt to convert the Old Testament into a footnote on Flying Saucers. (Personally I like the Old Testament as I find it, contradictions and all; I don't need any nut-cultists to rewrite it for me.)"

As far as I am concerned, if some of you nice people will forgive me for saying so, I respect these opinions—but I don't agree with them.

I am aiming at the general reader for whom Today's science fiction is the same new exciting experience that it was for me in the Thirties (OK—that does date me—but I've got plenty company!). I run occasional Ufological material—not as much as at one time and now, perhaps, from a somewhat different viewpoint (*not "nut-cultist" though, Jim*) because I am interested in reaching some of the thousands of people interested in this subject, who have an interest in and a curiosity about the world around them reminiscent of the days when SF fandom *did* have a sense of wonder and an alert, alive, almost heretical curiosity—before the present hardening of the intellectual arteries set in.....

Seriously, I do want to make one thing clear.

I am not interested in converting anyone.

I am not editing for myself—I don't think my publisher would appreciate my doing so. With rare exceptions, such as my Editorial Aside last month and an occasional comment in my column (yes—there'll be one next month) I have deliberately refrained from touching on matters of interest to me personally.

So—therefore—if I do run an article, whether it be on the philosophy of the Sub-Polynesian Mugwumps or on the things around and above us, in this World of ours that we still do not really know, don't snort in disgust and skip those next pages.

Read them!

You may be pleasantly surprised!

H.S.S.



IRRESISTIBLE FORCE

BY CHAN ELLIOTT

MY NAME is Sven Pakinaan. I was born on Earth and raised a forester. I served on many planets. And I managed the '83-5 survey of Kappa-Lyrae-III, which I named Tapiola. I didn't like Tapiola, and certainly didn't intend to go back, least of all in a small party.

Then, this Taylor Payne approached me about taking him there, offering me the sort of fee you don't turn down. So I went. The police-boat his influence chartered, set us down at the old Survey camp-site, he and me and his disciple Ed Greene, five tons of supplies, and the syntho-telepath beacon for when we wanted to leave.

While I made the site habitable again, Payne and Ed assembled a flier. The moment they finished, Payne decreed we should start exploring; when I proposed to inspect the thing, he cut me short. He was a slight, swarthy man with burning eyes and a Call to Lead his Fellowman towards the Light. He also con-

sidered himself a woodsman, which might have been true in a national park with a guide. Anyhow, we went; I went because he was my responsibility.

Sure as Fate, the engine began to halt three-hundred kilometers from base. I took the controls and won us a hundred. But then she came down in forest—a ninety-percent probability on Tapiola. Ordinary trees, we might have crashed through with only dents; but these went down and down, a nightmare of wrestling branches, and wrecked her; only the buoyancy tanks saved our lives.

Well, we camped. Payne wasn't in the least crestfallen by his blunder. He demonstrated how to pick a spot for our film-tent and cook a wilderness dinner from our emergency rations. I let him; I wanted to think. At least he was being Strong and Silent.

But after dinner, by the fire, Strong, Silent men open their hearts. He let you see him Listening, Think-

ing. Then he opened up on Tapiola: It was, was it not, a planet entirely devoid of animal life? "Only plants! The mighty trees in their serene wisdom, the gentle, lovely flowers, the whispering reeds, the—ah—lesser things content and happy in their places, moss and mushroom and—ah, Ed, I suppose seaweeds and corals and such mysterious ocean things."

"Ed, being a biologist, set him right on corals, diffidently.

"Oh really? Are you sure? Well, no matter. It doesn't really concern the point I was making. This is the fourth day of Creation before the beast and willful, foolish man."

Let him talk. I had to think. I was scared worse than I'd ever been in my life. At the skirt of the firelight, the crumpled flier was bloodied silver; and behind it, went up a blackness that might have been a cliff. But it was the trees, five times bigger than redwoods. No wild beasts, no clouds of blood-sucking insects, no snakes, no savages; just trees. Just Tapiola.

And I was alone in it with two fools who might become madmen if they ever woke to what I saw in Tapiola. My one idea was to get back to base alive and sane. I wasn't ashamed of that.

Finally I said, "Well, gentlemen, I think we should turn in. We have an ordeal ahead of us and we can't afford to waste an hour or an ounce of food. We must be up at dawn."

Payne gave me his piercing stare: "Oh come, Sven! Surely you're dramatizing. Personally, I feel our mishap is a providential opportunity for me to immerse myself in the spirit of this wonderful world, as I might not otherwise have done."

"Gods of Light forbid!" I thought.

"And what have three experienced woodsmen to fear from a hike through this harmless land? I have always found the Plant Folk bountiful; and surely this lovely planet will yield a wealth of fruits and nuts and roots, man's best food."

Before Ed could start on a thesis, I cut him off with a summary: "Fruits are bait to persuade animals to carry seed; no animals, no fruit. There are nuts, and without shells to speak of, but not good to eat; and a few tasteless tubers."

Payne looked as if I had arranged all this to thwart him, but in vain. "I'm sure your fatigue makes you pessimistic, Sven. I believe it was you who named this world Tapiola? Ancient, pagan spirit of the Deep Forest, wasn't it? Ah, you're more of a poet than you admit—or than one would think from that rough-hewn exterior."

Well, if he'd ever heard that piece of music, he hadn't listened to it—or understood it. Tapiola, ha? Poet? Maybe.

Anyhow, they turned in while I closed up camp and put out the fire. Then I switched off my flash, and stood while my eyes adapted to the near pitch-dark.

All around me, the world was filled with a hushing on the verge of silence, wind in the trees that filled the blackness for a thousand feet up. Payne had praised the pure democracy of plants, but what aristocrats had ever monopolized even the sunlight? In this monstrous glade, only swarms of toadstool things and waxy growths lived on the refuse of the giants. Yet neither the tyranny of the trees nor the scavenging of the fungi was the horrible thing. Real tyranny, even real cringing, would have been a relief, almost lovable qualities. Spirit of the Deep Forest, ha?

I gazed up steadily, waiting, till a single star pierced some chink for a moment. It was icy and unspeakably far; but I wished I were on any habitable planet it might own—any!

We set out as soon as we could see. Going was easy: fallen branches, even trunks, were quickly digested by the fungi, and no undergrowth could survive in the gloom.

Direction was obvious, so Payne took the lead. He strode along vigorously enough, darting glances from side to side. After an hour or so, however, he remembered the laconic comradeship the wilderness brings out in Men, and fell back beside me: "You know, I must confess I do miss the smaller, inoffensive animal life—squirrels, birds, woodmice. But I suppose that would mean predators too. Yet the silence does become oppressive after a while. We must change all that... How far would you say this type of forest extends?"

I told him that, according to my observations from the flier, we'd come out in river-meadows in about thirty kilometers.

He clapped me on the shoulder: "Sven, you're a natural reactionary. You said at least a fortnight to get back to base? Why, if I were a betting man, I'd wager we'll do it in a week." Then he turned to Ed, picking a topic congenial for him: "Well, Ed, has this first-hand observation given you any new ideas on how this beautiful ecology arose?"

Ed tried to earn his keep without perjuring himself: "Just the old ones, Chief. Maybe some missing trace-element; maybe chance failure to produce genes for contractile proteins; maybe some early plant-form so inedible and voracious that it choked out animal life."

Payne looked stern: "That last, I can't accept. Plant life uses only competition in mutual aid, even with animals. I like to think that this has triumphed here. It would make this world the germinal center for a new humanity conditioned to gentleness..." He was off.

By late afternoon we reached the river-meadows. Payne halted and scanned them, like a pioneer in a poster. Then, his brow knit and his lips twitched uneasily. He said, "You know, it's very interesting. This meadow world is so like one on Earth, it's difficult to analyse the

difference. And yet..."

Ed submitted: "Well, no flowers, of course."

Payne rounded on him sharply: "Why 'of course'?"

"Well, ah, Chief, as you know, flowers developed to attract insects to pollinate the plants. No insects, no flowers."

Payne donned that look of high-souled pig-headedness that would subjugate inconvenient facts to his credo: "Oh rubbish, Ed! That's official dogma; but we know the type of people who manufacture it. I hold that flowers express a joy in life too exquisite for our coarser natures. More likely, insects adapted to flowers. This just isn't flowering season in this region."

In two years on Tapiola, I had never seen a flower. But that would be just another inconvenient fact to subjugate. Anyway, Payne was subconsciously keyed up, and I didn't want to unsettle him further.

We camped near the river. Payne insisted on a fire but, after a very short Togetherness by it, turned in, leaving me to put it out. This was an ugly job, as we hadn't found rock to build it on, and the soil was a bed of roots. A grass-to-forest fire on Tapiola was a spectacle I had no wish to witness—maybe the river would stop it, maybe not. I had to dig down to moisture-level.

Then, Ed strolled up. He was tall and hungry with that incorrigible kindness that would wreck your best efforts, to pander to some hard-luck adept.

His type ought to be locked up in libraries. However, he helped me a bit. And he wasn't so meek and mild that he didn't curse the roots. "Miserable stuff anywhere," he said, wiping back a lank strand of hair, "But these are the worst I've ever struck. Look, they just throttle each other!"

Throttle was right. One ugly little cup-shaped growth had roots like wires, seemingly to cut those of com-

petitors. Above-ground, one rootless vine sank thorns in its neighbors, to suck juice, Ed said. He even thought some of the thorns were to deposit seed in the pods of victims. "Lack of animal vectors makes them ingenuous." He said, "Some of them behave outright vindictively."

So, at least his scientific compartment didn't accept Payne's creed. And as long as he thought in terms of ingenuity and vindictiveness, he wouldn't think in terms of—something worse.

Then, he flitted through a gastight mental bulkhead: "Sven, do you notice anything, ah, *odd* about the Chief? He's always high-strung, but he's tremendously excited about this planet. He's a great leader in Biosociology—you know, the movement to mold people in the Right direction by ecology. So, he hopes Tapiola can be colonized by one of the more contemplative races, like the North Americans on Earth, or the Hindi on Nirvanah. He believes he can start a new focus for humanity if he can bring up a generation on a planet like this, free of aggression." He was dead earnest, dangling a hank of murderously knotted roots in his hand.

I was too stunned to answer, as things fell into an obvious pattern: Payne! There had been one famous, or notorious, Manning Payne. I hadn't drawn the obvious connection... A small excuse: His acolytes always referred to him as The Man. The masses revered him—seemingly because he caused them to die by millions, and coined ringing blurbs about them. I'd seen his picture, an ikon in myriads of simple homes; but he'd been a big-faced, benevolent type—his son didn't remind you of him. Maternal contribution no doubt.

The Man had been a guiding spirit in endless interlocking outfits: Committee for..., Council to..., League of.... All were meticulously self-appointed, but starred such adjectives

as Democratic, Social, and Citizens', and were dedicated to managing humanity with new enlightenments. He'd begun as the lawyer who freed Billy Thoms for a renewed career of murder, pillage, random hand-outs from the loot and, so, a niche in the pantheon of folk-heroes. Payne had held the Breach against intervention in two Peoples' Revolts that ended in mass-murder tyrannies. He'd helped disarm New Haven before the Kreets moved in—the All for Peace Movement.

Not my business? So: He'd been on the Citizens' Board that stampeded Jones' Landing into donating handsome crop-surpluses to the chronic famine-world of Mahdze-Dong. Very noble. Only, on Mahdze-Dong a desperate government was trying to root out progeny-worship and so control disastrous over-population. Seeing no limit to free food, the masses doubled themselves in a short generation, while the surpluses ran out. The government, in despair, armed; and they erupted like a horde of locusts. An estimated quarter-billion of them perished in flimsy ships or tides of dead smothering ground-defenses. A dozen planets were ravaged—Jones' Landing with peculiar vindictiveness—before the Union could mobilize. Cousins of mine escaped with what they wore. Manning Payne came through with new laurels as chairman of the Federation for a Negotiated Peace. He also won the undying gratitude of thousands for his Refugee Bundles and his triumphant non-sequitur about The Little Folk Come of Age—which helped substantially to prolong the post-war chaos by fostering swelled heads that even then weren't very big.

His Institute for Brotherhood Now preached that equal genetic potential assured equal cultural maturity in three easy lessons. A friend of my father's, who had given his life to education on Bangami (no three lessons, and not easy) had been butch-

ered, and his wife and small daughters raped to death, in an inter-tribal riot traceable to the Institute's verbal alkaloids.

Truly, the war-lords kill their millions, but the Paynes, their tens of millions.

But Manning Payne had only treated cancers with aspirin, and psychoses with hashish. Taylor Payne, standing on his father's shoulders, proposed to treat tertiary syphilis by making the patient high-priestess in a religion of promiscuous love...

I agreed that Payne seemed tense, and slipped off into the starlight. Tapiola brooded around me—but brooding is alive, and this was negation of life. River-marshes breathed a dull stench of vegetable rot and fed the mist that hangs almost everywhere on Tapiola; it would carry no malaria, yet it was deathly beyond all disease. I cared little for semi-vegetable meechers like the Americans who had bred themselves into dead-end, or the Hindi who left Earth when their land Sold Its Soul to reason; but I gagged at what Payne and Tapiola would do to, and through, them. False religion is man's worse scourge. Here, it had its ideal false Messiah.

And here, in my hands, was power to stop it while it *could* be stopped. One neat accident, with no witness but an earnest simpleton, might scotch an infection that could devastate man... And, like many before me in such crises, I couldn't work that way. Something bewildered my human reason like marsh-lights. I plodded back to camp.

Next morning, a breeze made the meadow toss and frolic under fair-weather clouds, as if scoffing my morbid fear of it. Payne was amiable too. He could hardly sway crowds and beguile politicians without real charm; and now, it veiled his moody posings. But I knew my Tapiola, and

now I knew my Payne. I held my counsel.

We crossed the river by crude raft, and climbed the opposite meadow towards woods. My euphoria waned as we waded through tangled vegetation. Nobody cursed when he tripped, as in a normal party. And the woods gave no relief; these ones had undergrowth. I took the lead, picking and hacking a way. And Tapiola closed in again—the old, unfocussed horror like the impalpable blue haze. That presence had made survey-crews be never less than ten, had made us exaggerate drink, and horseplay, and wrangles. Now, I was alone in it with two paranooids.

We stepped high to avoid creepers and acrid puff-balls, and I thought of the prince's journey through Witchwood, in the Firebird.

Tramp-tramp. But not even one flaming, winged thing swooped from these branches. Trunks made endless vistas, each gap filled with farther columns till the mist swallowed them. Ahead, deafness, blindness, numbness opened out. Behind, deafness, numbness, blindness closed in like meaningless generations. You reached out to grapple it—nothing was there. Passive resistance perfected. Mindlessness.

Tramp-tramp. I thought of a little forester's cabin north of Lake Ladooga, alone and not lonely. In three years there, my first job, I learned even the insect-cycle—bulge-eyed ephemerids, tiny frog-hoppers, furry moths, seething on the window one week, gone the next. Why did they live? Yet—they *had* wondered at the light.

Tramp-tramp. I had played a part in the dramas of fish and game. Cruelty, yes. Squandered life, yes. But more. Something that was not here. Something that spoke of a meaning and hope in courage and mind, that Payne would never see...

Tramp-tramp. I thought of the Great Plains: the hand-agriculture

that supported maximum population; the smell of urine and sewage you never escaped; the big-eyed families of twelve; above all, the Workers, doting, fondling, sanctifying it all, learned in relieving sterility. Rumor said, their religion taught breeding from idiots—Innocents! Payne's fosterlings. Suppose Payne brought them here without even mosquitoes to fight, and bred missionaries to pander to mankind's queer perversity...

Tramp-tramp. Payne drew up beside me. His all-men-are-equal—especially-me had faded. He said sharply, "Look here, Sven: Are you sure you know where you're taking us?" Then, when I told him I was headed for height-of-land to take bearings, he went on testily, "I see. Not that I grudge time for this very wonderful experience, meeting this world frankly, cut off from man-made things. I'm learning what I can do for my wards through it. Beautiful! But I have deadlines..."

A glance showed his face wild and feverish. A sudden, ugly idea took form: If I couldn't kill him, Tapiola might madden him. Already, it was fermenting in him, and we had maybe a fortnight to go.

Tramp-tramp...

That night, we sheltered in a ten-foot hollow hole from a great thunderstorm, our fire lonely in the roaring, creaking sea of mindless tumult. Payne stood gazing out, exalted by it.

Next day, scantier growth and thinning mist heralded high ground. Noon brought us out on a bluff in clear air. The spectacle was majestic enough. A thirty-mile spread of unbroken forest swept to opposite heights. In those, with some relief, I recognized landmarks.

Payne scanned the view intensely, then gestured: "Look at it, men. A million great beings who have never known hate, ambition, or pride, who have never harmed other life but created themselves out of the pure

elements. Even in their bodies they have no government, no domineering, discontented brain; all works by co-operation. Think what such companionship should do for men... Sven, I hope you know where we're heading now?"

I told him that our base was just beyond a dog-tooth hill and we'd have to head north along the ridge and down a sloping bay. That would certainly take us to a stream, our best guide home.

"Why not here? It's steep but it's practicable. Let's take the straight route, the *forest route*." He turned decisively, but descended only two heel-braced steps before rounding on me with a sudden, gaunt anger: "And don't compare *my hills* to dogs' teeth."

The thought had flashed through my mind: Good. Let us claw through forest. Let Tapiola work on him. Now I realized: Tapiola was already at work. He was mad, all right, but not afraid...

Then, blind fate struck. As he turned wrathily back to the slope, a creeper, such as we had learned to step over, snared him off balance, and pitched him. He grabbed more creepers to stop himself, and rose at once. But his ankle gave. By the time we got him up top again, and his sock off, it was swelling badly. I found no large bone broken, but a small bone or a sprain could take longer to heal—and we'd starve before it did.

Well...down below, we could at least grub roots. We contrived a stretcher from saplings and creepers, splinted the ankle, gave him an analgesic, and started along the ridge to my bay.

To do Payne justice, he kept quiet now and didn't even grunt when we jolted. Ed and I had to be quiet too; we were fully occupied. But my mind worked on: I resented this casual accident that put Payne at a disadvantage. I'd wanted to see Tapiola take him, in his arrogant meekness, and

slowly reveal itself for the spectre it was—refute him, shatter his ego, drive him mad. Hah! Drive who mad? I wasn't relishing the weeks ahead myself.

Yet, the situation woke in me a resolve to fight while I could.

Ed wasn't built for the kind of ordeal we were enduring. We took two days to come into the valley. It was like descending into an ocean on Kalki the salt-world where no life was—but no life would have been better than that unchanging mist and the growing Stuff in it.

The second night, I camped while we could still see the ridge behind. Sunset above it was golden bugles. Along the skyline, the upland growth was a meaningless shag, not like man-fostered trees of Earth. But sunset uplifted me.

Then Payne broke his fast from testifying. When we had eaten, he expertly gathered our eyes with his that glowed fanatical in the firelight, and spoke swift, hot, and low: How his own animal willfulness, and not Tapiola, had caused this misfortune (if such it was). How he would stamp out self-will in himself, and establish a race without it, Tapiola aiding. He sketched his plans eloquently, the inverse of everything I felt to be good...

And my own self-will met him head-on. I'd been baffled by the lack of anything to fight. Now, behind him, the faceless jumble of growth merged in twilight, the endless sage and olive and drab and jade and absinth greens sank into a blackness where you could just imagine green; the millions of anonymous leaves became part of a nameless whole that we only called Tapiola. But out of it, Payne's firelit face emerged clearer and clearer, his eyes hypnotic, his lips rather thick in his ascetic face, writhing out blasphemy against life—the great blasphemy of life turning itself against life.

I made no answer. But here, I thought, was something I could grip and fight...I didn't know Payne yet!

He stopped finally and sat brooding—Communing. Then he switched to his terse, practical avatar: "Sven, perhaps I'd better have a sedative now."

I fetched the medicine-kit and took out the pore-injector. But he motioned me back and ran his finger along the vials, stopping at the gautamin label: "Here," he said, "we'll use this. You can give me a three-day dose. I'll be less of a burden, eat less of your food—and profit from my time."

Profit, ha? Yes, the Gautamin religion of the Hindi—really Communing. A few of their big saints took enough to free their minds from their bodies permanently—at least, the bodies were free of minds, lying enshrined. I said involuntarily, "That's dangerous."

He gave me a look of lofty disdain. "All the anodynes of life are vegetable, Sven; none are animal. Pain is animal. Plants reach out to heal it in us. All the great religions are based on what fools call narcotics: lotus-eating, opium—eh, wine, hashish, marijuana peyote, and now gautamin on Nirvanah. What's there to fear in Mother. Nature's open doorways?"

I could have told him, but to what purpose? Let him have it.

My mistake. Not giving it to him, which I couldn't refuse, but thinking it didn't much matter...

Next day, he was easier to carry. But...

His head jogged on the stretcher in front of me. It glided through the misty shades, blind, deaf, numb—yet undead. Was the mind inside it really discovering Tapiola, bringing Tapiola closer to us? Would Tapiola suddenly speak horribly through undead lips?

No. Worse. Far worse. It had no need to speak. It simply was. What

had Payne said? "No domineering, discontented brain." No mind. That was the horrible thing. And now, Payne part of its mindlessness. His accident—*It* hadn't struck him down, just as he said. *It* didn't know. It simply received him. And he would breed a race from *It*, with enough vitality only to infect and corrupt—mind turned against mind.

By Gautamin, he had slipped from my grasp, as intangible—and horrible—as the forest rustle. You can't fight the undead...

We tramped, two living minds in a hell of mindlessness. Ed didn't speak, for fear the sound would be too tiny... The only sounds of life on the globe were our breathing and the crackle-shuffle of our feet in branch and leaf rotting from undeath to death. Those sounds fell into the unliving whisper—feathers into a dead sea... I didn't speak. I feared that Payne and Tapiola had beaten me. I longed for the peace of being beaten, of merging... I held on...

A clear, chuckling joined our human sounds. We swerved, to find a mountain brook arching and braiding over rocks. Compared to the shaggy Stuff dipping into it, reaching to swallow the light from its gap, it was inanimate. Yet, it was bright. It thrust Tapiola back.

We followed it that day and the next, while it grew to be a young river thrusting Tapiola apart to let sky through. Where it joined a stream too wide to ford, we dug in to camp while I built a canoe. I had a small nuclear torch that cut wood like butter. A dugout would be too heavy; so, I stripped a coco-husk bark, soaked it in resin bled from another growth, and layered it shaping a hull. Ribs, gunwales, thwarts from hickory-tough saplings, paddles from heartwood. Working, I found myself humming old woods-men's songs from home:

"In Gorenško, in the mountains, the broad streams run down."

Tall pine-trees shed above them their needles of brown.

Hola-drijo-ri, hola-drijo-ri, hola-drijo-ri, drijo-ho!"

Pine-trees we had clothed with human names and warmths. The stuff under my hands was taking human forms and names—gunwales, paddles—becoming part of me, not of the Tapiola horror.

Ed tried some maudlin bleat about how wondrously the forest served us. I faced him across the hull: "The forest serves *nothing*, not even itself. Till I took this stuff and humanized it, it was just—Stuff."

He was a type that fumed at opposition—and tried to undermine it from behind. He temporized now: "Well, Chief'll be pleased when he wakes. He admires wood-craft; it's one of his vocations."

And Payne was pleased, as far as he was pleased—or displeased—with anything. He was a being brought reluctantly from a higher Revelation to guide the affairs of ants (beloved ants, parts of the All but—ants). He said nothing of the Revelation, of course; he could transmit that to finite minds only by inspiration. He conceded: "This innocent plunder compels even us to shape Beauty."

Exceptions to that Great Thought are a rule in themselves. But I kept counsel while he rambled on about peace lost with Eden (through a vegetable, wasn't it?) and this new, snakeless Eden, a portal to the All he was learning to know through gautamin.

When I stuck to my canoe, as a buckler against him, he gave it a ghost of his eagle-look: "Yes, but it's too big, Sven. I am resting here to complete my initiation, which I could not do at that focus of human fever you call Base. I can self-administer treatments and eat what I need. What can harm me? When you return with your machines and officers, I will know the Truth."

Ed broke in: "Well now, Chief, if

you stay I stay. I don't suppose I'll have *your* illumination. But at least..." He was deathly afraid, but screwed up to a Big Decision.

The hell with them both. I *would* reach help faster alone. And I'd confront Tapiola alone too—and lick it, and Payne.

In a fury, I built a one-man canoe and struck out downstream, into Tapiola. Payne didn't stay awake to see me go. Ed stood around making inane remarks, hoping I'd find some excuse to make him come after all—deathly afraid. I didn't want him. His job was to stay with Payne. And I had mine. I drove through the spread of that utterly evil forest, with only the stream for company. We both thrust Tapiola back steadily. I confronted my fear, and it melted. I had no answer to it, but I was on the trail of one...

I fought for days, paddling, dodging dead-heads, portaging, threading swamps. My hands grew raw, my back ached—pain. I had half the medicine-kit, but I rejected 'anodynes'. I wanted my wits clear. Pain? It's to make you think. It's made man fight himself to mastery over bacterial plagues and the vegetable-growth of cancer. I baked my back at campfires, sprayed myself gloves with the fibrin squeegee. Anodynes, hell! While I had stuff to fight, I'd fight. While I could fight, I'd cure my ills, not short-circuit them.

And gradually, I came to realize that I, this tiny, moving dot in the heart of this unmoving world of un-life, was the master. I'd grip it, fight it, and make it bend to my purpose, like the canoe.

Nights, I slept in that canoe hitched to rocky islands, not because I feared Tapiola any more, but because the stars and sound of water around me were good. Even the river-mists were different from that formless forest haze. I'd wake contented.

And gradually, I worked out what

was what...

I sprinted up the trail to Base, high on a bluff, and set the beacon to call the rescue-squad on Peterswurl. Every minute saved brought me closer to counter-attack. The syn-tho-telepath neuron-culture supposedly made instant contact over the light-years, but took time to build up response in the resonant receiver—two days there, two here for reply.

The Stuff had moved in, even in the few days I'd been gone. I mowed the clearing and sprayed it with a killer to slaughter the Tapiolan elephant-ears that shouldered up choking humanized grass and flowers. I felled scores of big ones around the edge; maybe that was foolish when a caterpillar-mill could have done it all in an hour and made planks of it. But even a token start was good. I scanned the cabin for the fungus-rot pressing like gas through any pin-hole, cauterized the spots, and sealed them. Nights, I slept luxuriously.

My beacon beep-beeped on schedule—all you could get in or out of Peterswurl through any filter that cut the psycho-noise. Next day, the telebeamed police-ship landed.

The officer was as nice a youngster as you'd meet, named Warde. I told him what he needed to know, and convinced him that his flier could neither locate the castaways under the forestmat, nor land anyway.

Next morning, we took off in my canoe. Paddling upstream was tougher, even with two. The second day, Warde put some analgesic salve on his blister and then worked his hands into raw beef before he knew it. That left him plenty of time to realize Tapiola as the banks and mist closed in on us.

Over our fourth campfire, he burst out: "Say, Sven, what gives with this world? It's kind of beautiful in a way, only... Holy Joe! What a hell of a world! What's wrong?"

Well, he was an ideal test-subject

for my Mental anti-Tapiola Vaccine, intelligent but not imaginative, as gulf-jumpers have to be. And he was coming to pick up something putrid with the infection. So, I put it into blunt words: "Well, Warde, what use is mind?"

He poised his coffee-cup: "Mind?! Why, it's what you are isn't it? What use would anything else be without it?"

"Sure." I indicated the wall of Stuff in the firelight. "Here's a whole world that lives without mind—anywhere. Clouds, rivers, sunsets, stars, rocks, galaxies, have no mind but they aren't alive; they're alien, but they aren't perverted. But this stuff feeds, and grows, and breeds, and even evolves, to fill a whole planet. It's alive and it knows *nothing*; it just is. But it's doing fine. So what advantage is your mind?"

"Well hell... I'm better because I know I'm better."

A good answer, but would it hold up? "Yet, it's made you uneasy. It's done worse to Payne and Greene."

"There's an answer. You know it?"

I said, "Maybe. Think it over yourself first."

You could almost smell rubber burning any time in the next few days when his resumed paddling gave him a chance to think. Once he let his paddle trail and looked around at the valley, millions of packed trees sloping up, up, up to the skyline and over. He said, hopelessly "It's so big. It must mean something."

That was what I wanted. I gave him his second shot: "Warde, half a million years ago, some anthropoids couldn't bother to develop human minds; they branched off into the apes, and now, we preserve them to study. A hundred-million years before, some furry things couldn't bother to develop even monkey minds; now, they're the beasts we use for food or pleasure. Half a billion years before that, some worms couldn't evolve even a fish mind;

they're the insects we exterminate or tolerate for ecology or color. And a billion years ago, some pond-life made the biggest abnegation of all and forked off as the totally mindless plant world. It's big, all right. But the most colossal blunder is still just a blunder. It doesn't impress me."

He thought it over and then declared, "You know, Sven, that's the most colossal *arrogance* I ever heard."

Then I really let him have it: "Yes," I said, "it is! And I stand on it, by God—and I *mean* by God! Anything that has enough mind to realize itself, and *doesn't* have the arrogance of its own worth—anything that goes around whining that feebler minds are so much Nobler and Realler, well—you'll see."

Days later, he asked, "So, what can you do about it?"

I swung my paddle at that huge, mindless tangle: "I'm coming back—Payne can't stop me—to shape *that* into my idea of meaning, my idea of beauty. And no apologies because somebody'll improve on me some day. That somebody'll come only if I fight now."

I filled the next days with accounts of my plans: How the Guild of Foresters would jump at the challenge I'd pose to them; how we'd establish a fighting ecology; how we'd direct humanized plants with humanized insect vectors to surprise bejazzus out of this junk; what approach we'd use on Payne's witless fosterlings. I could see Warde's uneasiness melt. I figured the Pakinaan treatment was a success.

But I still hadn't measured Payne's full reach.

Nearing camp, I was uneasy. The Stuff had swallowed my blazes. Forkings and rocks were utterly anonymous in reverse. In fact, I'd have passed camp if Ed hadn't galloped down the bank, waving his

arms and hooting.

Then I was even more uneasy. Turning in, I saw how his beard grew weedy. He nearly dumped the canoe, grabbing me. He stank—some lilies-of-the-field sanctity no doubt. As we landed, he babbled over and over “You came...came...Back!”

“Yes.” I barked to snap him out of it, “Where’s Payne?”

He wavered between doting and horror: “With—with the All.”

We found Payne in the lean-to I’d built (already melting into crowded, abortive seedlings like Hindi children). He’d taken the dose that knocks out the brain permanently. So, he’d achieved his ideal: he was a vegetable. But the significance didn’t hit me yet.

Young Warde grimaced: “Well, that’s that! No need to tote *him* back. Legally, he’s dead and they’d let him die on any civilized world. Not on Nirvanah, of course—but *they* won’t know or grieve.”

“Yes!” Ed doddered eagerly. “He said, leave him here. Merge with Tapiola. Merge with the All!”

Then I saw: Let that hulk get to Nirvanah, and they’d enshrine it, and hold anemic orgies over it, and show their humility by competing to perform the nasty little services it would need, and weave myths around it—all fecundity, and self-abnegation, and Merging.

Yes. But what if he just disappeared, *literally* merged with Tapiola? The whole cursed planet would be a shrine.

It grew on me while we made decent camp again. But alone in my sleeping-bag, I got it full force: The Successors who spring up after any Payne, like suckers around a stump, would carry on his Work, with the inspiration of the Legend. They’d flood their weeds into the planet to choke out any *human* colony like an untended garden. That is, unless we had the resolution to sit tight and watch their famines and plagues, or

even drive out passive invaders. That kind of resolve weakens sooner or later—and once is enough.

I could see Payne’s narrow, burning face, his noble understandingness for the vanquished: “You see? My way *must* win. The highest mind turns to end mind. You cannot refute the inevitable All. You cannot fight the unresisting.”

I writhed and groaned in my blankets. All the old, faceless horror of Tapiola closed over me again. It had sucked in and dissolved a doting Payne; it would suck and dissolve all mind...

Ed Greene shook me out of limbo, his horsy face gaunt in the dawn, gibbering with the Tapiola horrors: “See here! You aren’t going to leave me here, are you? All this blind, deaf...”

Rude wakening always angers me. He still stank.

I zipped open the bag and stalked at him, shouting, “Yes, I’ll leave you if you can’t act like a man. Get to that river and wash!”

He backed away alarmed, naturally not towards the river but almost stumbling over the lean-to. He glanced at the uncorpse there and rallied his looniness, hunched and glared like a wrathful sheep, shouting back. “I will *not*! You can’t order me! I refuse!” A look of silly cunning dawned: “I see. Leave me. You killed him. I’m the witness.”

The Thing, lying there, paralyzed me. I’ve seen grizzlier dead men from that sanctified anatomy. I’ve seen demagogues idolized into Great White Fathers who understand all, permit all, provide all—and stultify everything. But in the foggy corpse-light before dawn, Payne’s cadaver was more than a dead man, more than a narcotic, more even than a mouth-piece for Tapiola... He was a short-circuit to the All that is behind

even Tapiola, that turns life to deny life, valor to destroy valor, fertility to castrate races, the short-circuit away from the infinite road ahead, back into the gray-mist nothing that is the All.

That clammy, colorless mist engulfed me, immovable because it was everywhere, dissolving you in unresistance...

Through that moment's eternal horror, a more tangible fear stabbed savagely: Greene's crazed effrontery was no joke. Gas-tight compartments were his natural method of thought: Manning Payne had bungled millions to death; Manning Payne was an all-wise leader. Tapiola was mindless terror; Tapiola was sanctuary if Taylor Payne said so. And now, Payne had attained beatitude by a supreme renunciation and had been doped to death by a rival claimant for the planet.

Young Warde had appeared and was looking grimly from me to Greene who went on shouting, "But that Officer won't leave me, even if he is a tool of the Imperialists. Taylor Payne will rise to confound you."

Yes, and Greene would stick to one compartment till he'd at least ruined my reputation and secured the planet for the Payne Legend—and how plausible he could be! He'd flit through the bulkhead only on Nirvanah.

I knew the legal obfuscation, the well-heeled brotherhoods of bleeding-hearts, the skilled villification I faced. I still fought the gray mist, and Payne's own living corpse was my only recourse: "Officer, you hear the charge. I demand that we bring this—specimen with us in evidence."

Warde was certainly for me, but uneasy: "Before I could expend power for transport, Mr. Pakinaan, I'd have to know its relevancy."

"At this stage, experts can tell very closely how long it's been drugged. And you know how long I must have been away from camp."

Greene blustered shrewdly: "He's a citizen of Nirvanah and, as such, is *not* legally dead. You'll have to extradite him."

Extradition would take months. By then, an untended Payne would be mold and saplings, Merged. And all the little, expert claque would have rallied to stampede public opinion with their cries.

I said, "Not from a planet in the public domain."

"This is *not* public. Mr. Payne claimed it as a Nirvanah colony."

Oh fine! And They would rush a suicide settlement to clinch it. I beat at the mist: "That's only a claim, by a non-Union-member."

Green made like a noble sheep—Humble Disciple inspired to carry on The Work: "Nirvanah has Rights. Mr. Payne has Rights..."

That overworked word did it! Suddenly, the gas-tight bulkhead, insinuated into my mind by experts, burst. Payne's big play had bamboozled me: He had legal rights; he was a sanctified vegetable. Ha? Rights? What rights has a vegetable? He would never rise to confound me.

I cut Greene short in full prate: "If Payne is dead by Union law, his presumptive claim doesn't stand. And if the claim doesn't stand, Tapiola is in the public domain—and he's dead."

Green bristled with righteous indignation: "That's outrageous. That's a purely circular argument."

Warde grinned: "Yehr. So's yours. The courts'll decide which one has a minus radius. So I'll impound the evidence." He gestured at the uncorpse.

Greene panicked: "No! No! We must respect Mr. Payne's last wishes. If I must do so to save him, I withdraw the charge."

Warde said curtly, "Felony's State business. You're only a witness."

"But—well, we can bring him back, I suppose."

I laughed. I could master Greene:

"Not unless you *fight* your way in. That's the final test of Rights in this man's universe, you know."

Greene suffered: "No real Decision was ever made by Force."

"I could name a few." The look of gaunt, grieved Rightness set on Payne's death-mask might inspire sculptors to Interpret its Humanity; it would only have stimulated the Mongols, Hitler, or Gamal III.

For me, he was Stuff, to be swept aside or used...?

Greene was utterly disjointed. Then, incredibly, he wafted into a new compartment: "Yes, but see here. I have a right to come. I'll work for you, help you settle this planet."

Over-gods forbid! Followers of mine would take the wrong branch some day when the trail forked, because I'd been *that* much wrong. But *some* would take the right branch... Let Ed Greene in, and he'd bush the lot with some maudlin legend. *I* was no Payne. *I* hadn't the answers. I'd just fight my best, and open doors.

He insisted, "I'll do just what you say."

My brain was clearing more widely. A magnificent lie took form in it. Tapiola was Stuff to be used; now Payne himself was Stuff. Use him! I was sure now he hadn't claimed Tapiola for Nirvanah; he'd hold it in Trust till he Decided. I could bluff. I gestured to his hulk: "Ed, he didn't claim Tapiola for anyone but the Foresters' Guild. That's why *I'm* here. So you take him. Tour Nir-

vana. Tour North America. Tell them he wants us to accept only people who meet our standards."

It swept the board clean, Greene, Payne, their fosterlings. Maybe we'd even get some use of them. Maybe they'd help us salvage some genes and traditions of Pioneers or Rajputs.

Payne didn't rise. He was what he wanted to be—harmless, unresisting un-mind. Stuff.

The sun struck red-gold through tree-tops beyond the river. Morning mist drifted past trees and river like wraiths of life from Ameba to monkey. But life wouldn't have to make a long climb, fighting that sullen planet. Man, arrogant, aspiring man stood there on my two bare feet, ready to whip all comers, including Life's renegades.

I had whipped Tapiola. I had whipped Payne. And suddenly I saw the gray nothing that had drained life through them, powerless, its short-circuits cut. I felt the irresistible force that would move that moveless vacancy, the sun that would draw that mist. Life, mind, man!

To Tapiola and Payne, I felt no gratitude; I felt not even enmity. They were just stuff to help in the climb up the great slopes ahead, into the golden sunlight of life.

Already, I had attained through them the most irresistible knowledge of all.

I knew my Self.



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